BARCODE ON NEXT PAGE

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 1223 00348 1760

DATE DUE

SFPL MAY 18'82

220.9 I

69 '73

GAYLORD

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

THE CRADLE OF GOD

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CONFESSIONS OF TWO BROTHERS
(WITH JOHN COWPER POWYS)

EBONY AND IVORY

THIRTEEN WORTHIES

BLACK LAUGHTER

SKIN FOR SKIN

THE VERDICT OF BRIDLEGOOSE

HENRY HUDSON

THE CRADLE OF GOD

BY

LLEWELYN POWYS

JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE
LONDON

4 47637 SFPL: C-BKS
206 SFPL 11/21/01 5338

FIRST PUBLISHED 1929

220.9
P87c

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY J. AND J. GRAY
EDINBURGH

3 1223 00348 1760

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY

DEDICATED WITH AFFECTIONATE APPRECIATION

TO THE

REVEREND J. H. COWPER JOHNSON

PREFACE

It was my original intention to write a book describing my travels in Palestine. I found, however, when I set about the task, that my mind was bent upon meddling with these high matters in quite a different manner. There seemed a kind of impertinence in combining the two methods, and so I decided to reserve the narrative of my own personal observations for a later book.

Llewelyn Powys.

White Nose,
13*th August* 1929.

FROM THE FOURTH BOOK OF THE WORKS OF RABELAIS, CHAPTER XXVIII

Epitherses, the father of Aemilian the rhetorician, sailing from Greece to Italy, in a ship freighted with divers goods and passengers, at night the wind failed them near the Echinades, some islands that lie between the Morea and Tunis, and the vessel was driven near Paxos. When they were got thither, some of the passengers being asleep, others awake, the rest eating and drinking, a voice was heard that called aloud, Thamous! which cry surprised them all. This same Thamous was their pilot, an Egyptian by birth, but known by name only to some few travellers. The voice was heard a second time, calling Thamous, in a frightful tone; and none making answer, but trembling, and remaining silent, the voice was heard a third time, more dreadful than before.

This caused Thamous to answer; 'Here am I, what dost thou call me for? What wilt thou have me do?' Then the voice, louder than before, bid him publish, when he should come to Paloda, that the great god Pan was dead.

Epitherses related, that all the mariners and passengers having heard this, were extremely amazed and frighted; and that consulting among themselves, whether they had best conceal or divulge what the voice had enjoined; Thamous said, his advice was, that if they happened to have a fair wind, they should proceed without mentioning a word of it, but if they chanced to be becalmed, he would publish what he had heard. Now when they were near Paloda, they had no wind, neither were they in any current. Thamous then getting up on the top of the ship's forecastle, and casting his eyes on the shore, said that he had been commanded to proclaim that the great god Pan was dead. The words were hardly out of his mouth, when deep groans, great lamentations, and doleful shrieks, not of one person, but of many together, were heard from the land.

The news of this – many being present – was soon spread at Rome; insomuch that Tiberius, who was then emperor, sent for this Thamous, and having heard him, gave credit to his words. And inquiring of the learned in his court, and at Rome, who was that Pan? he found by their relation that he was the son of Mercury and Penelope, as Herodotus and Cicero in his third book of the Nature of the Gods had written before.

For my part, I understand it of that great Saviour

of the faithful, who was shamefully put to death at Jerusalem, by the envy and wickedness of the doctors, priests, and monks of the Mosaic law. And methinks, my interpretation is not improper: for he may lawfully be said in the Greek tongue to be Pan, *since he is our* all. *For all that we are, all that we live, all that we have, all that we hope, is him, by him, from him, and in him. He is the god Pan, the great shepherd, who, as the loving shepherd Corydon affirms, hath not only a tender love and affection for his sheep, but also for their shepherds. At his death, complaints, sighs, fears, and lamentations were spread through the whole fabric of the universe, whether heavens, land, sea, or hell.*

The time also concurs with this interpretation of mine: for this most good, most mighty Pan, our only Saviour, died near Jerusalem, during the reign of Tiberius Cæsar.

Pantagruel, having ended this discourse, remained silent, and full of contemplation. A little while after, we saw the tears flow out of his eyes as big as ostrich's eggs.

THE CRADLE OF GOD

WHENEVER I walk back from the village of East Chaldon to the White Nose it is my custom to rest upon a certain bank by the side of a downland track. From this still, silent place I have constantly surveyed the ultimate reaches of the physical universe. Looking up from there at the moon, and at the far-off melancholy stars, I have often been constrained to catch my breath, as, with an effort of will and a vault of the imagination, I have tried, in the presence of the massed gorse-bushes, and in the presence of the illumined shining leaves of the turnips, to envisage, spiritually as well as intellectually, the true significance of the Christian faith. On such occasions I have comprehended the material cosmos, and not in vain. Mystery beyond mystery, space beyond space, and against them the belief of my heritage like a single candle flickering in the void, like a wooden match struck for a moment in a heathen temple.

It was here one winter's night that the sound of church-bells came to me fitfully upon an east wind. It was the first time that such music had ever reached to this remote spot. And as the distant

belfry-ringing drifted uncertainly over the leafless thorn hedges, over the enfolded hills littered with bright flints, I resolved, if it were possible, to visit the actual acres where Jesus had been born and had been crucified. If I myself could hold in the cup of my hand the dusty soil of the Mount of Olives, then, perhaps, I would come to a juster understanding of these incredible impossibilites. Surely the privilege of pilgrimage should not be reserved for the righteous alone. A sceptic, a pagan, nay, a common whoremaster might well to his profit undertake so honourable a journey. If, in the opinion of my father, and of my mother, and of my fellow-islanders, this thing truly had happened, then before death put an end for ever to such momentous cogitations, it would be admirably done to inspect this country called holy for nineteen hundred centuries, to see with my own eyes the village that had been the home of a God, to see with my own eyes the legended tomb of this Saviour of the world, the marrow of whose bones, so it is bruited, was only half human.

In due time, therefore, I found myself treading upon this God-trodden soil, treading upon it and tracking the Great Spirit's footmarks in the hot

dust. And as I followed this zigzag trail I soon discovered that it led back to the original progenitor of the Jews. I soon discovered myself, in fact, like a traveller in one of William Blake's prophetic pictures, entangled in the web of Abraham's beard. It was this crafty star-gazer who invented the God of us all. It was to him that an unformed presence, shy, arbitrary, and thirsty for human blood, but also with rudiments of tenderness such as might be developed if he drank the right sort of milk and ate the right sort of honey, came stepping softly between the juniper trees to whisper in the stockman's ear as he lay asleep on some dark night, *when there was no moon*, 'I am God, I am God, I am God. That cold, fickle moon is not God. I am God. I have no name. I remembered not when I was not. For æons of time I have haunted these hills, and only conies and pygargs and wild asses have worshipped me; but now, you black-bearded shepherd, you will worship me and I will give you the greatest of all powers, the power to beget without stop or stint. I am God. I am that I am. I drink blood; but sometimes I feel strange feelings of softness come over me when the wind sinks down on the palm trees by the Jordan. I am God, O man, O Abraham, and together (you worshipping and

I growing under your worship) we will touch the secret of life.'

Thus in that mysterious commerce between Abraham and his Vision there was born God, the God of jealousy, the jealous father of men. Thus there came into being that strange barbarous adolescent Absolute, so dependent upon the savour the generations gave him, so dependent on what the prophets said of him. Real and yet unreal! Creator and not created! Very God of very man! Only one race could have given this Absolute its historic start. And to Abraham's vital loins, itching to beget thousands, there came a chill from the cold moon. This great, potent cattleman, with long black hairs under his armpits, had become testy, had grown atheistical and peevish towards the cold moon of those temples of his childhood. What a moment, when, after a good dish of camel's milk, as he sat dreaming and biting at some tart, coffee-tasting root, he suddenly thought, 'The supreme God is one God. The supreme God is a Person like I am!'

The cave of Machpelah is on the side of a hill at Hebron looking to the west. It consists of two caves, an outer and an inner one. It is believed that

the inner cave has remained undisturbed. Long before the death of Sarah, Abraham had marked it down as suitable for his purpose. On some occasion when his mind had entertained thoughts of mortality he had doubtless turned aside from the surveillance of his hirelings and had searched the nearby escarpments for the exact formation he wanted. Like an old dog-fox that knows the various earths of his district, so did this famous procreator make himself acquainted with the holes in the ground within reach of his tent under the oak of Mamre. A mosque now covers the sacred site. Only once has a man ventured to enter the burying-place underneath. An old crusading knight used to assert that he had in his youth actually seen the skeleton of Abraham. It is only with extreme difficulty to-day that Christians can gain admission even into the mosque. I set my right eye to the keyhole of its door, and in this manner was privileged to get a glimpse of a monument, dedicated to Jacob, which is said to mark the place where, far below, in undisturbed darkness, the bones of that superlatively sly one repose. Yet that day, as the hot, dry sunshine poured down upon the massive, obstructing masonry, my mind's eye was tormented. I had come to the celebrated

charnel-house. There they lay within a few feet of me, the human remains of Abraham and of Sarah, of this man and his wife whose descendants have been responsible for such great matters. Here within a few spade-depths lay El Khalil, the friend of God. Here he has lain with his woman while the restless centuries passed over their heads. They were here, sightless, and deaf, and silent, when Moses smote the Egyptian, when Eglon covered his feet for the last time 'in his summer parlour,' when Jesus uttered the names of the patriarchs in the temple-courts, and when John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, sitting in Bedford gaol making tags for bootlaces. 'Dust is their diet. Light they see not. In darkness do they sit.'

The day I visited Hebron there was no cloud in the sky. Wishing to get a more comprehensive view of the locality, I walked to the top of the hill above the village. I crossed a dusty Moslem graveyard wearing that neglected look which so often belongs to the cemeteries of these Ishmaelites. Beyond this derelict plateau, parched to a drab colour by the sun, was a vineyard-wall protected by thorns. Out of this garden some Arab boys brought me clusters of yellow grapes; and, clam-

bering with these over a grassy slope, I sat down under the shade of an olive tree to eat my luncheon. On all sides grey rocks, like bald skulls, protruded from the hills. And as I rested in that confined circle of coolness, ensconced under a canopy of blue such as is unknown in England, my mind reverted to the life-story of the prehistoric herdsman buried below.

I saw him, this follower of the moon-god, Sin, arise and come out of the land of Ur, this ancestor of the men with bright eyes and sharp elbows who cause Fifth Avenue in the noon-hour to be as thronged as that lane through the Red Sea when the waters were 'as walls' unto their fathers. I saw him pitch his black goat-hair tent under his chosen terebinth, saw him, this father 'of such as have cattle,' receive his promises of prosperity. His children should increase 'as fishes do increase,' should be as many as the stars in the heaven, as numberless as the dust of the earth, as the grains of sand on the Mediterranean shore.

How convincing are the glimpses we are given of his life in that tent, with wings black and outstretched as the wings of a crow – the morning when he observed the smoke of the cities of the

plain rise up into the sky over the Dead Sea as though it were smoke from a faggot-filled lime-kiln – the morning when, for the sake of domestic peace, he sent his son away with bread and a bottle of water placed with his own hands upon the back of the woman who time and again had climbed into his bed – the cynical laughter of his wife, 'After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my Lord being old also?'

But for all Abraham's ninety and nine years his vigour had not waned. We read of his 'running' to fetch a calf, tender and good. And, indeed, he had, counting from that day when he rested under his holm oak, seventy-six more years to live. Surely Saint Paul was speaking imprudently when he declared that the Jews sprang from the bowels of a man 'as good as dead.' Even at ninety-nine Abraham underwent the rite of circumcision, as a physical earmark, so to speak, of the solemn covenant he had with the Almighty; yes, and lived, as the Scripture tells us, to marry a second wife, even Keturah, who bore him six sons. Well can we imagine the look that this prince of shepherds would have given his excitable descendant had he heard the Pharisee, 'with a heart of furious fancies,' dub him as good as dead, that noon as he sat in his

tent-door 'in the heat of the day.' Not dead yet, my master! Many another flap-eared goat was he to cull from his flocks, many another ox was destined to feel the master's hand laid with all a stockman's intuition on his hairy, twitching rump. Even when the time came for the marrying of Isaac, the old man was full of vigour; the thigh under which the servant put his hand, in the hour of his oath, was no lean old man's thigh, but limber and firm, and well capable of carrying the patriarch over the rough pastures of his rocky home. Yet these pastures were not his pastures. He was, in truth, but a guest in the land of Canaan, a guest by the courtesy of the sons of Heth. The cave only was his, this cave that he had bought with four hundred shekels of silver 'current money with the merchant.' A guest of the sons of Heth he was; and yet, as he went about over those hillsides, he nursed to his heart the belief come to him in his vision that this land, this inconsequential parcel of dust to the east of the Mediterranean, had been given unto his seed for ever.

Abraham's legitimate son, Isaac, had a more winning character than his father. It is possible that his early upbringing inclined him to an attitude of greater tolerance. He had seen his father

carry his indurated monotheistic obsession to the most extravagant limit possible. The obsession had grown stronger and stronger in the head of the old man as the years had passed. More and more did he become convinced that there existed between him and the most powerful of all the gods a staunch alliance. As his herds and flocks increased, and his children multiplied, this profound emotion of transcendental awareness took entire possession of his mind. His alliance with his 'friend' became a sovereign faith, so that at last he was prepared to offer up his very son as a sacrifice to it. There is something sad about seeing this honoured sheikh raise the knife against his own flesh, after the manner of any savage Canaanite. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.* That scene, enacted at a place three days' journey from Hebron, perhaps actually upon the sacred temple-rock at Jerusalem, affords an early example of the treachery so often latent in religious feeling. Whenever men allow their minds to forsake the sweet sanity of the earth, there is danger. With dutiful gentleness Isaac allowed himself to be bound upon the celebrated altar; but the look in his father's eye, as he followed his ass laden down with faggots, must have made a deep impression on him when, in retrospect, he

considered it in connection with the hazardous sequel of the journey.

The idea of blood-sacrifice – how deeply from the first it took possession of man's beclouded and besotted mind! It survives still. We see it in the shop-windows of those who traffic with religious tokens to-day: red blood, this ichor that sustains our being, still offered as a symbol of life to unseen powers. Early man, appreciative of the wonder of a goat deftly leaping on chiselled hoofs, could not be satisfied till it lay dead with blood streaming from its throat on a surly rock: this its beginning, and still our mystical insights receive a savage sustenance from the spectacle of scarlet blood-drops. From the dark forest-shambles of antiquity the stream has trickled down to our own day. Life is blood and blood is life, and to satisfy foolish and animal fancies we use its spilling for the expiation of our sins. What a commentary is here upon the essential barbarism of human nature! Theologians compose their tomes, they offer their involved and contradictory explanations, and always the bloody symbolism draws men unto it. It has for the generations a wicked attraction. It is as much a product of our baffled spiritual aspirations as our horn-tipped fingers are the product of the natural

growth of our bodies. Affrighted ourselves by the mystery of existence, we attribute the same bewilderment to God, and think to touch a communicating chord by cruel and outlandish demonstrations. It comes to pass, therefore, that the generations, each in its hour, before their jointed skeletons are laid away in the sides of hills, repeat in forms openly avowed or covertly disguised this same folly. 'Without shedding of blood is no remission.'

Abraham would have been deserving of greater respect if he had refused to have anything to do with so violent a test of faith. But already strange thoughts were astir in his skull, thoughts full of implications for the future of mankind. The appearance of the ram caught by his horns in the thicket prompted presumptuous premonitions. 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.'

Of the wives of the patriarchs, Rebekah, who carried 'two nations' in her womb, would seem to be the least satisfactory. We can forgive Sarah and Rachel for their jealousies. Leah was ready enough with her mandrakes, and the triumphing of the Egyptian was not easy to be borne. Both women were essentially loyal, however. It remained for

Rebekah alone to take advantage of Isaac's blindness. There is a deep pathos in the famous story – the woman plotting so cunningly to outwit the old man, putting hairy goatskins over the smooth skin of her son, till the smell of him was to the nostrils of the father 'as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.' Like mother, like son. Upon my soul, they were a pretty pair! Did those two eavesdroppers outside the winged tent feel no natural pity when they heard the celebrated question and answer? 'Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy first-born, Esau. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly.' Did they feel no misgivings other than craven fear when the voice of Esau broke from the shadowed interior 'with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father'? It is over, cancelled, forgotten in the outer darkness of oblivion. The bones of the duped father lie close to the bones of the designing son, the hands that blessed and the head that received the blessing, equal now, equal for all time, shut away from the brightness of the sunshine as it falls on olive-yard and vineyard.

If Jacob may be described as the most unscrupulous of the three fathers, he was also, without doubt, the most interesting. His story presents us with a

lively illustration of how success may be won in this world, when subtlety is added to an unswerving concentration of purpose. The man was a veritable jackdaw for knavery. None knew better how to pull wool over the eyes of others. He had a leaping ambition. He was scarce out of the womb before he was observed by the midwife to catch hold of the foot of his twin brother, as though harbouring already in his embryonic skull, before the bone of it even had properly grown over, a plan for laying Esau by the heels, which, indeed, as the years passed, he did to a good purpose. To a pretty tune he fooled him over the matter of 'that same red pottage,' and we have already seen how he overreached him with regard to their father's blessing.

It was during his journey to his relations in Mesopotamia that it first becomes clear that he had inherited the wild anthropomorphism of his grandfather. Not only was he a practical opportunist, but his head, apparently, was rioting with the belief that the creator of the universe, the inventor of the camel, of the palm tree, and of the pismires, had selected him, and him alone, for the bestowal of especial favours. It was a madness that redeems him. What momentous monomania was this, that

could cause a quick-change mountebank, fleeing from justice, to dream, as he laid his head on the stones of the bare hillside, that he saw a ladder whose top reached to heaven? Then it was that the man became cognizant of a great destiny. To his mind there was nothing incongruous in the audacity of his vision. That such an escalator concurred with the secret yearning of his soul we can hardly doubt. 'This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' In the early morning, still under the influence of his unchecked monolatry, he got up and raised the stone that he had used for a pillow, setting it on end and pouring olive oil upon it as a kind of consecration. He then continued on his way, knowing full well in his heart that the covenant God had made with his grandfather had once more been confirmed.

Like many another man of fierce purpose Jacob was capable of deep affection in his family life. The love he bore for Rachel and for Joseph and for Benjamin was genuine and profound. There still hangs over his first meeting with Rachel a romantic grace. Anyone acquainted with the customs of the East can well envisage the scene, the dusky-featured, long-robed men, the three flocks

of fat-tailed sheep lying about on the dry ground scattered over with sheep's excrement, the side-stones of the trough shining from the grease of the ragged fleeces, the bright sunshine, and the young stranger, his mind freed at last of all dangerous thoughts, drawing the maiden to his arms to kiss her, the destined mother of millions!

There is something humorous about Jacob's relations with his Syrian uncle. It was a game of 'snap fox, snap jackal.' For a time it looked as if Jacob had met his match. In order to win Rachel he served Laban for seven years, but when the day of his reward arrived, behold, in the darkness, and when his head was light with the wine of the wedding-feast, Laban slipped that 'wild cow,' Leah, his eldest daughter, between the sheets. 'And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? Did not I serve with thee for Rachel? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the first-born.' And after this manner he defrauded Jacob to the extent of another seven years of labour, 'consumed by drought and frost,' which to those acquainted with the son of Isaac was a development most un-

expected. Even at the expiration of this time Laban was unwilling to let Jacob go. He had become a shrewd and honest yardman, and under his direction Laban's stock prospered. In his pastoral vocation he evidently possessed what the Masai call 'a hot hand.' It was now that Jacob conceived the idea of basing his wages upon the colour of the cattle and sheep born. All the animals that were 'speckled and spotted' were to be his, after the bulls and rams and he-goats and the cows and ewes and she-goats of variegated hue had been removed. This was agreed upon. Against all expectations, the beasts speckled and spotted were multiplied exceedingly. Jacob made use of the ancient Arabian fancy that cows and ewes are influenced in their engendering by what their eyes fall upon. He took rods of poplar and hazel and chestnut, and 'pilled' white strakes in them and made the white appear which was in the rods. These rods he set in the gutters of the watering-troughs. This device may have been of some assistance to him. He himself was of the opinion, however, that his ancestral God had supervised the lucky spermatizing. For in a vision he had lifted up his eyes, and, as was his heart's desire, he had seen that the rams that tupped and the bulls that mounted were each and

every one of them 'ring-straked, speckled and grisled.' When Laban and his sons observed that he had 'gotten all this glory,' they were ill-pleased. 'And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.'

He was by this time rich and the father of many children. He therefore set his sons and wives upon camels, and with all his cattle before him stole away from Padan-aram 'unawares.' Rachel, perhaps not quite satisfied in her mind as to the efficacy of her husband's deity, surreptitiously robbed her father of his teraphim, his household-idol. It was some time before Laban had news of the flight, for he had gone up to shear his sheep. Even when he pursued his nephew it profited him little. The image was hidden under a camel's saddle upon which shameless Rachel rested. 'For the custom of women is upon me.'

It was now necessary for Jacob to announce his return to his brother Esau, and he sent forward messengers. In spite of his apprehensions, his exultant spiritual disorder was strong upon him. At no time was he more confident. As his camel-caravan advanced it passed phantoms, and he recognized these as belonging to the hosts of his God. But more than this, after he had sent his wives and

children over a tributary of the Jordan called the Jabbok, and was alone in his camp on the eastern side of the river, the God of his grandfather suddenly appeared and began to wrestle with him; and as the two swayed backwards and forwards until the breaking of the day, behold, the mysterious athlete got more than he looked for, and was fain to touch the hollow of the man's thigh, and yet the shepherd still held him in his grasp. 'And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. . . . And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.'

The meeting of the two brothers was memorable. Esau, full of natural affection, ran to meet Jacob, 'and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.' He saw his brother's women and children and asked to whom they belonged. 'The children which God has graciously given thy servant,' came back the unctuous answer. So Jacob, with his family, 'led on softly' towards Shechem. It was

here that an event occurred very characteristic of that early tribal savagery soon more and more to be associated with the polity of Jehovah. It would seem that these super-vital Hebrews, with the impressive exception of Joseph, were peculiarly given to concupiscence. Possibly for this very reason chastity became in later times an important item in their moral code. Throughout the centuries they revealed themselves as being very touchy about such matters. They had no indulgence for 'fooling.' Now, it happened that Dinah, the daughter of Leah, made friends with the women of the neighbouring tribes of Perizzites and Canaanites. And while she was with them a young man named Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, fell in love with her. The Bible says, 'He was more honourable than all the house of his father.' In any case, he 'loosened the girdle of the maid to defile her, and discovered the thigh to her shame.' Afterwards, loving her still, he made honest overtures to Jacob, asking to be allowed to marry her. He offered to give any dowry for her. Whereupon the sons of Jacob said they would consent to the alliance if Prince Hamor and his son Shechem and all his people were willing to undergo the Hebrew rite of circumcision. This they agreed to do, and without

delay subjected themselves to the irksome operation. Thereupon the children of Israel, knowing that they were mutilated and in a sore condition, fell upon them suddenly and murdered all their males and spoiled their city, and took away 'their sheep and their oxen, and their asses . . . and all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives.' The ignominious predicament of their victims was of the very kind to be appreciated by the caustic, laughing-to-scorn humour of the Hebrews; but, for all that, it was an action tricky and not to be commended. It would seem that Jacob experienced certain misgivings over the affair; for he said to his sons, Simeon and Levi, 'Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of this land.' However, he continued to put his trust in the God of Abraham, after this incident even perhaps more whole-heartedly, for he commanded that the image Rachel had stolen should now be buried under an oak tree. Having performed this pious action, he took himself off and journeyed by slow stages to Hebron.

The sons of Jacob themselves were by no means averse to indulging in venery when a suitable occasion was offered. The tribal trimming they underwent upon the eighth day after their birth did

not seem to interfere with their aptitude in such pastimes. From their kings down to the fellahin they would come to it when they had a mind, though it was, after the manner of those who fear God, with somewhat sorry a grace. Reuben, for example, lay with his father's concubine, Bilhah, the mother of his half-brothers Dan and Naphtali; and he was one of the best of Jacob's sons, doing what he could to save the life of Joseph, and willingly going into the harvest-fields to fetch aphrodisiac potatoes for his mother. We know, too, how 'merry' Judah could be when he was off to his sheep-shearing with his friend Hirah, the Adullamite, on a fine spring morning. 'When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face. And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee (for he knew not that she was his daughter in law). And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me? And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock.' As a result of their play that morning, Tamar conceived twins; and there follows in the Bible one of those homely, intimate, realistic, and irrelevant passages that make the book such incomparable reading. 'And it came to pass, when she travailed,

that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez.' As a matter of fact, Pharez was a direct ancestor of King David, and therefore, in the opinion of the devout, an ancestor of Jesus also. For this reason the word 'irrelevant' would seem to be ill-chosen for this ancient piece of bedside gossip.

There is a dignity about the last days of Jacob's life that restores our respect for the old conspirator. We see him being led into Pharaoh's presence by his clever, capable son – the aged Hebrew who had been persuaded to migrate like a rat for bread. 'And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from before Pharaoh.' And yet the old rogue, for all his

grudging, was to enjoy the sunlight of Egypt for another seventeen years, dying at last with his sons about him at the ripe age of 'an hundred and forty-seven years.' 'There are many old camels which carry the skins of young camels to be sold.'

As the hour of death approached, he summoned Joseph to his bedside and made him put his be-ringed accountant's hand under *his* thigh and swear to him that he would carry his bones out of Egypt to the burying-place of his fathers in Hebron. Amid all the pomp of his adopted land, with its idle canals, and steaming vegetation, and stately monuments, Jacob's thoughts reverted to a far-distant landscape. The cave on the stony hillside of Hebron, the inner cave, became for him in his Hebrew pride the only desirable tomb. He had not forgotten it. It was where Esau and he had buried their father, where the bones of Leah the tender-eyed lay, where the bones of his mother who had loved him so dearly rested, and where the men of old time had buried Abraham and Sarah, his wife. 'Bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt.'

It was now, as 'he strengthened himself and sat upon the bed,' that his aged memory recalled the promises made to him by God under the almond tree at Bethel in the land of Canaan. And in those

solemn hours before 'he gathered up his feet,' a shadow of the future crossed his mind, and he saw it, that vast procession of his children, shocking, inimical, and beatified, prowling off into the furthest future of history. 'Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob: and hearken unto Israel your father'; and he prophesied. And one was to be 'as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?' And another as a large-limbed ass 'couching between two burdens.' And another as an adder in the path 'that biteth the horse heels.' And another a wolf 'ravening in the morning.' And he blessed them with the blessings of the Almighty, with the blessings of the God 'which fed me all my life long unto this day'; and he blessed them 'with the blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb. The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.'

Joseph fulfilled his promise. He had Jacob's body embalmed by the physicians 'his servants,' the bowels of it taken out and the corpse filled with pitch, and after the fashion of these strangers wrapped and rewrapped with fine linen bands made out of flax grown upon the muddy reaches of the

Nile. Then all the house of Joseph and his brethren, and his father's house, journeyed to Hebron behind the circumcised cadaver, journeyed up into that land which had been promised to the dead man's seed for an everlasting possession. And when the inhabitants of Canaan saw the funeral-cavalcade, with chariots and horsemen of Egypt, and heard the sore lamentation that rose from the troop, they said, 'This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians,' little wotting that they had come out to see the interment of the ancestor of those who one day would chase them from their fenced cities and dash out the brains of their children. For, in sooth, the old shrivelled image in the hieroglyphic coffin, with its proud forehead and hooked nose, had been at pains to people the earth with no weaklings, no 'hinds let loose.'

As long as the shepherd kings, the Hyksos, reigned as Pharaohs in Egypt, the Hebrews prospered. They made themselves useful as overseers, auditors, tax-gatherers, and as herdsmen for the royal stock in the land of Goshen. There came a time, however, when the native Egyptians freed themselves from their oppressors and drove this foreign dynasty out of the land, and it was then that the children of Israel fell upon evil times.

Egypt already swarmed with them, and the authorities became seriously alarmed. 'Come on,' they said, 'let us deal wisely with them'; and instead of allowing them to remain as free herdsmen, they conscripted them to build cities and pyramids, 'for every shepherd was an abomination unto the Egyptians.' And the years passed, and they made the Hebrews to serve 'with rigour.' Indeed, the Jews, who have never cared for manual labour, were compelled to sweat like overworked pack-mules. It was an experience that made the deepest impression upon the psychology of this sensitive, highly-strung, commerce-loving people. To this day their most important feast celebrates their escape from it. But the more they were afflicted the more they multiplied like hungry fleas in a pallet of straw.

At last Pharaoh called midwives to him and commanded them to kill every male child when they performed their office for the Hebrew women and saw them 'upon the stools.' But the midwives had the fear of God in them and excused themselves by saying, 'The Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.' Then Pharaoh charged all his people to drown

every male that was born in the Nile; and it was because of this order that a child 'exceeding fair,' who was to be the greatest, save one, of all the Hebrews, was found by Pharaoh's daughter cradled in papyrus-reeds near the bank of the great romantic river.

The child was brought up as an Egyptian in the house of Pharaoh. When he reached to man's estate he committed a murder, and was compelled to fly the country and become a shepherd in a far land. One day, when he was grazing his sheep near Mount Sinai, he noticed, not far off from where he was, a bush burning, which the flames seemed unable to consume. With the indolent curiosity of a solitary herdsman who has nothing to do all day but loll about on the rocks, watching lizards, and whittling sticks, and throwing stones at wandering sheep, he sauntered over to the place. Behold! It was the God of Abraham, the God of that dead man in the inner cave, who had bethought him of this primitive method of attracting attention. The moaning and groaning of the Hebrews 'by reason of their bondage' had reached his ears. The creator of the world, hearing the complaints of his chosen people, had remem-

bered his covenant. He who watched over the impallas by Lake Elmenteita, who knew the number of the hippopotami 'furnished with scythes' in all the rivers of the earth, who was cognizant of each cow moose moving towards the shelter of the timber-line over the shell-rock of the American mountains – he who was no stranger in the ultimate borders of space, in the Milky Way, nor in the inaccessible prairies of star-lit space beyond – he, the great Lord of Life, had come down to the scrub-covered foothills of Mount Sinai to make himself once more known to the children of Abraham. 'But who shall I tell them that you are?' inquired the astonished and disquieted vagrant. 'And God said unto Moses, I am that I am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.' So spake the Absolute, the essential being, the great cattleman of the stars.

And God said, 'I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.' If Moses encountered any opposition from Pharaoh, then God

promised to smite Egypt with some of 'his wonders,' which, indeed, he very soon set about to do. For Pharaoh's initial reaction was a natural one. 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go. . . . Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord. Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks.' It was not long, however, before a great clamour arose amongst the Egyptians. 'We be all dead men.' A plague had smitten every firstborn in the land, excepting always the firstborn of the Hebrews, the upper doorposts of whose houses were sprinkled with the blood of a ram lamb without blemish. 'Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker. Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth.'

It was an exceeding great triumph, an issue never to be forgotten. They had been rescued from their slit-eyed taskmasters, and would never again have to gather litter, or have to set up on end the vile black mud of the Nile in blocks like dominoes for the sun to dry. They went out of the country, a mixed multitude, 'with flocks and herds, even very much cattle,' and what was more, they

cajoled the Egyptians into lending them 'jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment . . . and they spoiled the Egyptians,' and against any of the children of Israel 'not a dog moved his tongue.' And under the protection of their thaumaturgic deity, the Hebrews crossed over the Red Sea, 'at large like horses and leaping like lambs.' 'And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, and the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.'

Long afterwards the Egyptians spread the rumour that the Hebrews were nothing but a company of slaves, who by horrible rites desecrated the sacred animals of Egypt, and whom eventually it was necessary to expel from out the land as a nation of lepers. Their redoubtable God, they declared, was in reality but a turnpike donkey which they came to worship on this simple account. When wandering in the wilderness without water, with their tongues lolling from their necks, a wild

ass galloped past them; and, following him, they were led to a wady full of water. So that forever afterwards this particular long-eared animal, obstinate and frolicsome, was adjudged by them to be the true God. Such malicious fabrications, concocted under the influence of the blank eye of the Sphinx, may be dismissed as naught, as the veriest grit to grate in the teeth of a superior people. The children of Israel had already a sublime confidence in their henotheistic deity and were in no way in doubt as to his attributes. 'The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name. . . . Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the Gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?'

At the south-east corner of the Mediterranean the waves of that inland sea plash upon the edge of a sandy wilderness. At intervals the yellow-ribbed levels are broken by groups of palm trees, with clusters of rusty-coloured dates held in nests of fibre under their waving, upspreading leaves. Bizarre starfish-shadows are cast by them upon white-and-golden lawns of sand. Like plumed Egyptian feathers these shades lie on the hot ground dented by the heavy-cushioned feet of pass-

ing camels. To the south extends the wilderness, the peninsula of Sinai, leading on and on to the eastward, into the God-haunted deserts of Araby. In every direction the dunes are moulded by the wind to lines of naked beauty broken only by dotted patches of sterile scrub. It was into this desolate, uninhabited waste that the children of Israel passed in their flight out of Egypt.

There is a curious verse in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Numbers which reads, 'Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.' It is not to be believed. 'Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of the rock?' The heroical horned genius who led his raggle-taggle gypsies across the Red Sea was anything but that. His thoughts, his actions, the words that he uttered, are all of them stamped with the impress of a formidable and headstrong personality. Like master like man. The God of Mount Sinai, whose presence made its very summits to quake, had his counterpart in the arbitrary and passionate ethnarch. This man who dared to go into the thick darkness 'where God was' is to be regarded as one of the most forbidding mortals that have ever been born to women. His powerful will with the force of a

sledge-hammer drove the iron wedge of his law into the trunk of human history. More than any one was he responsible for launching upon the world 'these crudest of Asiatics' to whom we owe our gods. It was he and no other who really let loose these intransigeants 'at large like horses and leaping like lambs,' this extraordinary tribe whose sublime spiritual passion has brought down fire from heaven not once, nor twice. We others, lapped about in the drowsy lethargy of semi-consciousness, resent the disturbance to our sleep that their presence in our midst entails. For centuries we have mocked them, persecuted them, gagged their inspired lips; and yet, even in these modern times, it is they more than any who seek our release, rending wide luminous slits in the veil of the temple of eternity. It has not been for nothing that this mighty champion of a race of slaves, with his negress as a bedfellow, led forward the children of Israel.

The dialogues that pass between God and Moses, those heroic compeers, are incomparable. Their discourse is the discourse of equals. And always the people murmur, murmur like bondsmen. Now their minds turn back to Egypt with its excellent vegetables, its 'cucumbers and garlic,' its playful

ichneumons for ever on the search for the eggs they love, its fantastic gods. And Moses grinds the golden calf that they had made in a fit of nostalgia and compels them literally to drink it up as though it were so much leben. They call for meat, and God answers them: 'The Lord will give you flesh and ye shall eat. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days. But even a whole month, until it come out of your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you.' Together they destroy them like house-flies. 'Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, besides them that died about the matter of Korah.'

After such a manner did these two lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. But this departure was not accomplished save with labour and stress: the one great herdsman mollifying the wrath of the other, as they hustled their backsliding cattle forward on their long pilgrimage. 'And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? . . . that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy

bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, into the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? . . . And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? . . . I will smite them with pestilence, and disinherit them.' Yet see how each knows the weakness of the other; for Moses answers: 'Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring the people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness . . . and the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word: But as truly as I live, all the earth will be filled with the GLORY of the Lord.'

Perhaps the least impressive part of the priestly story has to do with the detailed instructions God gave to Moses in regard to the building of the tabernacle, instructions that were derived, perhaps, from memories of the Egyptian temples of that day. The Jews have always been a people of great spiritual intensity, but their intensity has been directed toward literature and the science of morality, rather than toward any perfection of the arts and crafts of man's hands, and in consequence this

first attempt at a national sanctuary was distinguished by a certain quaintness of taste. The tabernacle, for example, was to be covered with a sheet made out of badger-skins dyed blue. Why God should have desired to be sheltered by the blue pelts of this friendly berry-eating animal it is not clear. We can understand better the covering of rams' skins dyed red. It is curious to think in this connection that there must have lived certain men whose sole occupation it was to dig out badgers from their secure earths on the slopes of Sinai for this so novel purpose. And how one would have liked to have seen Moses, after the affair of the Golden Calf, stalking out of the camp, when 'all the people stood up, and stood every man at his tent-door and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle.' There he was, the great solitary octogenarian who had brought down from the heights of that rugged mountain those ten commandments upon which the working morality of our everyday life is based. This familiar decalogue staked out an admirable rough-and-ready path for our society to travel upon; albeit, to a reflective mind there is not one of their number that should not under particular sets of circumstances be broken. They cannot be regarded as a final and

absolute code for directing human conduct. Just as any judge in the strict administration of the law of the land may offend against a secret higher justice, a divine ideal justice taking into consideration the hidden influences that led the culprit to his trespass, so these celebrated injunctions cannot be entirely relied upon by those who seek the light. 'For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?' Each situation that arises is unique, and to follow the perfect way it might be necessary for a good man, in obedience to a more sensitive knowledge, to transgress each one of these oracular prohibitions. 'To live as a fool is the only hell, and true piety is naught but viewing all things with a serene mind.' Or, as Baruch Spinoza so wisely understood years ago, 'virtue is intelligence.' It is seldom right to commit a murder, but we can conceive of occasions when it would be right. It may be seldom right to commit adultery, but again it may not always be reprehensible to indulge in so complicated a pastime. It is extraordinary how after more than three thousand years our troubled minds turn for guidance to the rude regulations of this ancient Hebrew savage. Small wonder that 'the skin of

his face shone' after his experience in the 'clift of the rock'; but even so it must always be remembered that he only looked upon the 'back parts' of God, the side of God, in fact, that could condemn a priest's daughter 'who played the whore' to be burnt with fire, and a man who picked up sticks on the Sabbath day to be stoned to death. How the severity of such ordinances disfigures these noble pages! And yet through it all, now here, now there, come indications of a happier, more tolerant, more gracious revelation. 'Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry. . . . Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.' Perhaps it was such seeds, falling upon good ground, that have given us what is most valuable in the Christian doctrine – primitive seeds, like the seeds of the grass that was later to evolve into corn – but preserving under their rough husks the promise of a more enlightened culture, a higher civilization. Yet for the present the God of Mount Sinai remained as intractable and truculent as ever. 'I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will

make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before thee.'

In the early years of the Hebrews' peregrination through the wilderness, Moses sent spies into Palestine. He directed them to go up from the south into the hills about Hebron, in order that they might 'see the land, what it is, and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many.' Years ago, in Africa, I remember an aged Masai warrior describing to me the procedure of his race when a raid was in prospect; how spies would be sent out, who for days would lie in the grass, 'like snakes,' watching with the receptive eyes of those hybrid Nilotics the goings-out and comings-in of the unsuspecting negroes below. A shiver would pass through the tall oat-like grass, as the cold of the African dawn would come up from the valley where already the first wisps of smoke could be seen curling into the sky through the stained thatch of the huts. And always these watchers would be there on the hilltops, observing the progress of each unrecorded hour like intelligent 'snakes,' looking down upon it all, taking it all in – the children at play on the

caked-mud platforms, the women going to fetch water from the familiar pool in the river, and the return at sunset of the sheep, goats, and cattle with grass-filled bellies. Joshua and Caleb and the other ten men were sent to perform the same office. But the inhabitants of this land were no unprotected harmless Wakikuyu. Behold, they lived in cities whose walls reached 'unto heaven,' and they were of enormous stature, possessing the monstrous proportions (later to reappear in the physique of Goliath) of the mysterious race of giants who seemingly peopled Palestine between the period of the first cave-dwellers and the appearance of the Canaanite. Echoes of this terrifying race are constantly recurring in the Bible. They are referred to as the Zamzummims ('murmurers'), Emims ('dreadful ones'), and Horims. Such were the men that the twelve spies saw sauntering in the cool of the evening between the twisted blackened stems of their vines, 'giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants'; and the Hebrews felt faint with fear, and they tiptoed out of the country, back to where they came from, carrying on a pole a large cluster of grapes which they had stolen near the river Eshcol as a proof of the fertility of the land. But the grapes, purple and

yellow, the pomegranates and the figs which were brought into camp served but as a torment to the children of Israel. Instead of the prospect of massacring the men, women, and children of a nation weaker than themselves, they realized that if they meddled with these gentlemen Canaanites, their skins might be in danger. A profound depression weighed down their spirits; for, said the spies, 'we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.' God, and his henchman Moses, experienced the exasperation of sportsmen who have placed fighting-cocks on a prepared table, only to discover that a crest has drooped. 'The Jews were crafty, but God also was crafty, for God is the best of crafty ones.' Back to the 'howling wilderness' he ordered them for another forty years. Not a man of them over twenty, save Caleb and Joshua, was to be allowed to live long enough to witness the successful invasion; 'only the little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for your carcases, they shall fall in the wilderness.'

So four more decades passed over their heads, and they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, 'being destitute, afflicted, tormented.' Dur-

ing this period, food was provided for them, 'meat of a strange taste: even quails to stir up their appetites'; also the ground was spread over with round things 'as small as hoar frost,' which were known as manna, and the taste of which was 'like wafers made with honey.' Water they drank out of the 'flinty rock.'

The tedious time did not go by without certain encouragements. They encountered in battle and completely overthrew Sihon, king of the Amorites. The god of the Amorites and Chemosh, the god of Moab, were as barley-chaff before Jehovah. 'Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh.' And afterwards they turned and went up by the way of Bashan and utterly destroyed Og, the king of that land, 'him and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him alive.' The deep impression that their successes made upon the minds of the Hebrew host may be traced in their songs of triumph. The battle-pæan of these insignificant tribal wars has resounded down the centuries. The truculent deity of Abraham recorded the humiliation of these unfortunate peoples in words of notable contempt. 'Moab is my wash-pot, over Edom have I cast out my shoe.' The very length of the bedstead of

Og, who was also a remnant of the giants, has been celebrated ever since as a proof of Jehovah's invincible power; and it seems that the odd names of these petty monarchs are destined to be held in mind till the crack of doom.

The fortunes of the children of Israel were now rising. Small wonder that Balak, the son of Zippor, was distressed because of them, saying to the elders of Midian, 'Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field.' In vain did he summon Balaam the son of Beor, the man 'whose eyes are open,' out of Aram. The prophet looked down upon the children of Israel under their black tents. 'And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor. . . . God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. . . . Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.'

It was ordained by God that Moses himself should not enter Palestine. This ruling was a trouble to the heart of the energetic legislator, who for so long had been directing the affairs of Israel.

And he spoke to the Lord and said, 'I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord answered the old man curtly, 'Let it suffice thee: speak no more unto me of this matter.' However, before he died he was allowed to go to the top of Pisgah and cast his eyes over Palestine, even 'unto the utmost sea.' Moses at that time was a hundred and twenty years old, and 'his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.' In the written record of the human race, what a moment was this, when those aged eyes, clear still as the eyes of a peregrine falcon, scanned the stony hallowed acres from Ramoth-Gilead to Mount Carmel, from Hebron to the Sea of Galilee! Often had those same eyes stared down Pharaoh, regarding him sternly; but never, I think, had their terrible power been more concentrated than when he stood alone upon the mountain, marking out those famous topographical outlines, as it were from a map outstretched before him. There exists a legend that Moses rendered up his soul only with the greatest reluctance. It was no easy matter for that stupendous vitality to leave the lusty stir of earth. The angel Gabriel was sent from heaven to persuade him to die of

his own will. The messenger explained to him that all was in readiness above for the reception of his soul. Still he remained deaf to such talk, uttering, it is reported, the two words, 'Be off'; and it was only by a ruse at the last that his soul was taken from him in some unknown cave 'on Nebo's lonely mountain.'

The leadership of the children of Israel now devolved upon Joshua, and he forthwith sent out two men to spy upon Jericho. These men made friends with a harlot of the city, and under their caresses her heart softened towards them. With a detachment often characteristic of such women she told them all that they wanted to know, and, when a search was made for them, even went so far as to hide them under some bundles of flax upon the roof of her house. It might almost be said, therefore, that the children of Israel made their first breach into the Holy Land through the back-door of a bawdy-house. And the conduct of their campaign was compatible with such a beginning. 'The Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in their hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach.'

The Canaanites were a people infinitely superior in culture to the Hebrews. They were murdered without compassion. Jericho was utterly destroyed. With the exception of the girl who had befriended them, and her particular family, the Hebrews slaughtered every living creature. They even stabbed to death the asses at their cribs, the sheep in their yards. Nothing that breathed was spared. The life of the town within its walls of stones and baked bricks, with its rose-plants and cool palm trees, and pools of 'naughty' water, was ruthlessly brought to an end. And the continuation of the invasion matched its beginning. With clubs and rude primitive weapons of stone and bronze they hacked their way from city to city. None was spared. Kings were hanged and horses were houghed. They passed through the country like a pestilence. No longer now did they eat manna, but the stored grain of their enemies, 'the old corn of the land.' 'And I have given ye a land for which ye did not labour and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and olive-yards which ye planted not do ye eat.'

The entrance of the Hebrews into the land of Canaan was an almost perfect example of the kind of consorted racial ferocity that has made, and still

makes, the story of the human race more blood-stained and merciless than that of any other brute beast running in packs. We vertebrates who have learned to balance ourselves upright upon our heels – who can estimate the feral wildness of our animal blood? With talk, with pious exclamations, we disguise our barbarous impulses, impulses more froward, more deliberate in their will to destruction, than any entertained by pard or spotted hyena. Truly, we are born each one of us with black reins, and from the first days of creation there has been blood upon our spatulate thumbs. Not all the districts, not all the cities, were captured by the Hebrews, Jerusalem, the stronghold of the Jebusites, was not taken. Neither were the Philistines, nor the Canaanites who dwelt in the Plain of Esdraelon, conquered; the former because they were a match for the Hebrews, the latter because they possessed iron chariots. The rest of the population accommodated themselves to the pressure of the migration as best they could. They gave the Hebrews their daughters in marriage, they taught them how to cut vats in the rocks for holding olive-oil, and instructed them in the worship of their fertility god. The generations of the ancient world were accustomed to bloody un-

provoked intrusions. They were no more and no less surprised than we Europeans were when the Germans crossed into Belgium.

What a wild, sanguinary period was this period of the Judges! Year after year the cries of the Hebrews rose up from the country. Now they were whining and full of lamentations; now they were being vexed, were 'sore distressed,' were calling unto the Lord, and then suddenly there is heard one of their ruthless battle-chants. 'Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song; arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. . . . The kings came and fought. . . . The river Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. . . . Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer: and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.'

One after another, judges that were no judges

rose up among the people, strange men of fox-like understanding, sons of strumpets who saw no evil in sacrificing their virgin daughters as burnt-offerings to God. Eglon, the king of Moab, re-captured Jericho and oppressed Israel for eighteen years. Then there appeared the hero Ehud, a left-handed man, a Benjamite, and he went to the king, saying, 'I have a secret errand unto thee, O king,' and the monarch of Moab 'was sitting in a summer parlour which he had for himself alone.' 'And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly: and the haft also went in after the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly: and the dirt came out.' How the old chroniclers love to put on record with realistic detail each incident of their stories, how they mock their enemies, 'laughing them to scorn' at every chance! Their genius can convert human agony into wild poetry, so that no heart can remain unmoved by the jubilant rancour of their incantations. Deep down in our souls something responds to their predatory pæans, to their sense of tragic irony. Our blood leaps up as though we had suddenly been awakened by the screaming of an eagle

with stained claws. 'The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself. Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two?' We read of Gideon tearing the flesh of the elders of Succoth 'with thorns of the wilderness and with briars,' this potent man who had begotten of his own body seventy sons, each one of whom, in his hour, was to be slain upon a single stone by the hands of his brother, Abimelech, the child of Gideon's Shechem concubine, who himself was to have his skull cracked in by a piece of millstone thrown by the hand of a woman.

A wilful, unabashed people, they have preserved in clear letters the tradition of their rage and rapine. To reap where they had not sown was never far from their purpose. It was sufficient provocation for the sons of Dan to look down upon a happy valley and see the folk, 'how they dwelt careless after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure,' for them to smite this people of Laish with the edge of the sword. The Benjamites at Gibeah violated an unfortunate woman, one after the other,

all night long, until she lay dead upon the threshold, deaf to her man's command, 'Up, and let us be going.'

It is with relief that we come to the story of Samson, though its fables have still about them the same note of primitive savagery, fables of his having killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, of his having burnt their standing corn with torches tied to the bushy brushes of three hundred wretched foxes (collected first into a shed, according to the commentators), of his having carried away the gates of the city of Gaza upon his mighty shoulders, after a night spent with a woman of that city. 'Tis indeed extraordinary how this rude people out of the wilderness have been able to intrigue our imaginations with these narratives of their early folk-lore. In winter-time, when we pass a withy-bed with long, pliable, whisker-like growths ready for lobster-pot making, inevitably we think of the 'seven green withs,' and upon the woman who weakened him with the beauty of her countenance. 'If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle. . . . But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison-

house. . . . Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice. . . . And they called for Samson out of the prison-house; and he made them sport . . . and Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.' And there in that ancient city, which to-day offers to travellers the same glimpses of blue sea that must have been present to Samson as, in a truly human mood that had 'no relish of salvation in't,' he hastened down its streets on his first visit to the town, the old hero destroyed himself in such a manner that the dead 'which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.'

A lovely gentleness surrounds the story of the prophet Samuel's early life, a gentleness redeemed from any excess of sweetness by the sturdy integrity of the narrative. Hannah, wife of a certain man called Elkanah, came to Shiloh with her husband to worship and to sacrifice at the house of the Lord where the Ark was kept. At that time

the high-priest was Eli, an aged man who had for many years judged Israel. Eli, as was his wont, was sitting 'upon a seat by the post of the temple of the Lord,' and from where he was he marked the woman's mouth moving in silent prayer. As no sound came from her lips, he concluded she was drunk, and rebuked her; but when he learnt that she was fretting 'because the Lord had shut up her womb,' he told her to go in peace, promising that her petition would be granted. The woman, when Samuel was born, dedicated him to the service of God, and he was brought up by Eli. When performing religious duties, he wore a 'linen ephod,' but otherwise a 'little coat' which his mother brought to him when she came up each year with her husband to offer sacrifice.

Now corruption was prevalent at Shiloh. Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who in the most scandalous fashion took advantage of their priestly position. They extracted with their 'flesh-hook of three teeth' more meat from the seething sacrificial cauldron than was their just allowance; and no young woman who came to the door of the tabernacle was safe from their lickerish looks or worse. It was on this account that God first spoke to Samuel when the boy was only twelve years old.

The light was burning dimly in the temple, and the child and the old men were sleeping, when he suddenly presented his forehead, 'prophesying woe.' 'I will do a thing in Israel at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.' Directly he referred to the evil he was intending to the house of Eli; indirectly, perhaps, to the capture of the Ark by the Philistines. Hophni and Phinehas were both to die, and the remaining members of Eli's family were 'to crouch' to Samuel 'for a piece of silver and morsel of bread.' This news was duly reported to Eli the next day, and the disasters that had been predicted followed. The Ark of the Lord was taken by the Philistines, and Hophni and Phinehas lost their lives in the battle. 'God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one that goeth on still in his trespasses.'

It was noticed that Eli received the news of his sons' death with apparent equanimity; but when he heard that the sacred box of acacia-wood had been captured, 'he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died; for he was an old man, and heavy.'

His midnight interview with the Deity seems to have completely transformed the character of

Samuel. His personality in the future becomes that of a jealous and exacting prophet. Once more the Lord of Hosts had found a seconder, a sectarian after his own heart. It is possible that if the truth could be known – the bald, unvarnished, atheistical truth – the mischief brought about by this confederacy was far greater than that derived from the three-pronged fork of Hophni and Phinehas. The Philistines soon wished the Ark to the devil. Their god Dagon could not be prevented from prostrating himself before it, and innumerable mice came up out of the earth, eating their millet-seed, their stored figs, and dates, and, worst of all, these proud princes became afflicted with hæmorrhoids 'in their secret parts.' They called for their priests and diviners and inquired what they should do. And these wise men instructed them that they should have made five golden images of 'emerods' and five golden images of mice, to represent their five great cities, and put these singular objects into the Ark, and the Ark itself upon a new cart. Two calving cows were then to be harnessed up, cows which had never before been yoked and whose calves were to be taken away from them. 'And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh and went along the highway, lowing as

they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.'

Now the Israelites of Beth-shemesh were busy with their wheat-harvest, and these simple farm-hands, when they saw that it was the Ark that had been returned, threw down their reaping-hooks and ran to it and broke up the wood of the new cart and offered up the two God-bewitched milch kine 'as a burnt-offering unto the Lord.' And they rejoiced, and in the excitement they felt at the novelty of so unexpected an interruption of their labours, they looked into the famous casket of shittim-wood. Its contents might very well have evoked a smile on the lips of countrymen accustomed to coarse jesting, but we are not told that it did. Merely for the offence of looking into this sacred shrine, haunted by God's spirit, they were slaughtered. Fifty thousand and seventy men lost their lives; and, as well they might, 'the people lamented.'

It is apparent that in those days the Lord was extremely authoritative. He was always speaking things to Samuel 'in his ear'; and if there was the slightest swerving from the directions given, 'a worry' was sure to follow. The Lord had a retentive memory, and it presently came into his mind

how the Amalekites three hundred years before had ventured 'to lie in wait' for the children of Israel. He now proposed to pay off this old score by slaying 'both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, and camel and ass.' Saul waged war with them. He utterly defeated them, but spared, however, 'the best of the sheep and oxen' and the life of Agag their king. This rational behaviour was counted against him. Samuel, no longer now of gentle spirit, as in the old days under the tuition of Eli, came hurrying into the camp with 'What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' Excuses counted for nothing. He commanded that Agag should be brought before him. This king was beginning to feel more hopeful. He said in his heart, 'Surely the bitterness of death is past'; and he approached the prophet 'delicately,' that is, with polite and propitiatory steps. Samuel looked him in the eye, and under the spell of his frenzied superstition 'hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal,' afterwards announcing to Saul that his kingdom had been given to a neighbour 'that is better than thou.'

When walking along the Nablus Road from the Damascus Gate at Jerusalem, a little after you pass

the mulberry tree opposite the Garden Tomb, I used to notice a monument on a distant hill to the north-west of the city. It reminded me of Hardy's monument on the Portisham Downs and one day I asked its name. Mizpah, they told me. It was the very hill from which Samuel had judged Israel, this dour old man, who never took an ox or an ass, and never uttered a civil word except in his prayers. It was from there that he went on circuit, like one of the itinerant justices appointed by Henry II in England.

Although in those first days at Zuph, Samuel had seemed to favour Saul, communing with him alone on the housetop, and ordering his cook to put before him a shoulder of lamb, yet it is abundantly clear that he was never able to forget that the young man had supplanted him and his house. Like an ill-omened marabou stork he strutted after the unlucky king, forever carrying ill-words, forever carrying ill-tidings.

In his old age he retired to his home at Ramah, the home of his childhood, the home of his father Elkanah, and his mother Hannah, only leaving this place to anoint with oil from his ram's-horn David the son of Jesse. Samuel died at the age of fifty-two. He was a great one for obeying the

word of the Lord. 'Now therefore stand still that I may reason with you,' he would say to the fickle tribesmen of the Hebrew commonwealth. By bringing down thunder and rain, he thought to implant in their hearts their ancient dread, thereby preventing them from going after 'vain things which cannot profit nor deliver.'

A tragic glamour surrounds the figure of King Saul, such as is scarcely again found in the Old Testament. His proud, sombre nature darkens the pages of the ancient script like the passing of a thunder-cloud, resplendent and riven. His case was not a simple one. His psychology was extremely complicated. His moods, nay, his very spirit, altered swiftly. His soul found no stability in its forlorn chambers. Samuel himself had observed how malleable his temperament was: 'and thou shalt be turned into another man.'

Certainly the Lord had laid upon his tall shoulders no light and easy burden. It was his task to rally the scattered tribes of Israel, to persuade the Hebrews 'to come forth out of their holes,' and continue once more their desperate conflict against the superior forces of their masters, the Philistines. In this difficult undertaking, Samuel, the prophet

whom all Israel honoured, did not really give Saul his support. In his priest's heart he bore him a grudge, a worldly grudge. It was one of the anomalies of Saul's character that from the beginning of his life till his horn was 'defiled in the dust' he was pathetically dependent upon the goodwill of this surrogate. From the hour that he was entertained in Samuel's 'parlour,' until 'he fell all along on the earth' in the 'hutter's house' of the Endor witch, the prophet maintained his spiritual domination over him.

Saul had not reigned two years before he was rejected, and it was his fate to contend manfully for the welfare of his people in face of the knowledge that he and his house were doomed. He was chastised 'as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.' Any stick sufficed to beat him with, and the smallest indiscretion brought wrath down upon his head. His head – it was just there that his trouble lay. Man can withstand any affliction of the body; but when God sees fit to trouble the mind, there is no reviving. In old, eighteenth-century language, Saul suffered from 'the vapours,' from those terrible dark thoughts that rise from nowhere and settle like foul miasmas upon the human brain. For the half of the days of his life his brow was shrouded

with one of those dark skull-caps such as God reserves only for the damned. Melancholy nested with him, melancholy approximating to madness spread her sable feathers about him. When at the feast of the new moon he sat in his accustomed place 'upon a seat by the wall' in his palace at Gibeah, she was at his side; when he stood under 'a pomegranate tree which is in Migron,' she was with him; and when he went in to rest in the sheep-cote of En-gedi, it was she, and not David, who encompassed him about in the dusty darkness of the cave. Then, and at all times, it was his mind that was the matter. Small consequence it was to him to lose the skirt of his robe while vulture thoughts satiated themselves upon his stricken spirit, upon that spirit which prompted him 'to eye' David, to lie naked prophesying for a day and a night, and in the end to lift up his voice to his lifelong enemy, saying, 'Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail.'

We would have to come to the gospels before finding a character as civilized and as full of grace as was that of his eldest son. With a rare and natural ruth Jonathan passes like an angel between the ranks of these foreskin-hunters, an Israelite,

indeed, in whom there was no guile. On the plane of spiritual development his position is far higher than that occupied by Samuel, or Saul, or David. Valiant as Hector, he offers to us an uncommon example of a soldier who belonged by inheritance to the kingdom of God. His sensitive, romantic personality redeems a narration too often shocking. 'And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee.' Strange, unprecedented words to come from the mouth of the heir-apparent of a ruling king. Surely there was justification for Saul's bitter protest: 'Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom.'

This first king of Israel was like a bull caught in the meshes of a net, like a mad Castilian bull. God at the first accident repented him that he had set up Saul as king; while Samuel was ever ready pestering him with prophecies of impending

disaster. David, at every opportunity, overreached him. Saul's continual hope was that this shepherd rebel would deliver himself up 'by entering into a town that hath gates and bars'; but behold, before the king could so much as stir from Gibeah, there was David scurrying off into 'the wilderness of Ziph' like a sand-partridge speckled and nimble. When David on the hill of Hachilah likened himself to a flea that the king of Israel had come out to seek, his words were not far from the truth. He was a flea in Saul's beard, and never could the rabid king put finger and thumb squarely upon it. His very daughter played him false, placing an image of David in her bed with its head upon the pillow. Small wonder Saul warned the Ziphites that David 'dealeth very subtly.' How often was he not mocked by this man, the very water-jar by the side of his bolster stolen from him, and yet his unhappy life spared!

But at the last his old enemies, the Philistines, forced upon him the boon of death. On the high slopes of Gilboa their archers sorely wounded the unhappy king, and their horsemen and their chariots pursued after him, so that he fell upon his sword, 'lest the uncircumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me.' The next day the Phil-

istines found Saul's body; and they cut off his head and stripped off his armour and fastened his body to the walls of Beth-shan. The head, that proud God-cursed head, they placed in their temple dedicated to Ashtaroth. To-day the excavators at Beisan have laid bare the foundations of this place of worship. There it may be seen, together with the walls of the city upon which the mutilated torso was hung, until the men of Jabesh-gilead, stealing down to the place, took it away to bury it in blessed peace at last under a tree in Jabesh.

'He chose David also, his servant: and took him away from the sheep-folds. As he was following ewes great with young ones, he took him.' David, the national hero of the Jews, their great soldier poet, 'the sweet psalmist of Israel,' distinguished himself first by killing Goliath. He had been sent by his father to the camp of the Hebrews with some food for his brothers, who were fighting in Saul's army, with ten loaves, ten cheeses, and 'this parched corn.' In spite of the raillery of his brother, 'With whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?' he was allowed to go out against the Philistine champion, whom he slew with a smooth stone cast from his sling. And the king said to Abner,

'Inquire thou whose son the stripling is.' It was after this that David was summoned to the palace at Gibeah to dispel by his playing on the harp 'the evil spirit' that had been sent by the Lord to trouble Saul. 'And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly.' For David had the gift of provoking love, that most precious gift that it is in the power of God to bestow. He was the darling of the people, the Robin Hood of the wilderness. Very different he was from Saul. He was free, reckless, open-hearted, a brave soldier, and a shrewd politician; but also – and it is this that makes his personality so interesting – he was a poet. From his boyhood his imagination was inflamed by the traditions of the religion of his fathers. These feelings he expressed in songs and psalms of stirring power. The cunning of his playing on the harp, and his devotion to all music that came from instruments made of 'fir wood,' give us the clue to the glamour that surrounded his name. It was this æsthetic side of his character, the imaginative, unaccountable aspects of it, that won the adoration of his followers. The genius of this shepherd boy captivated the children of Israel. 'Whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.' His first poetic lament upon the death of

Saul and Jonathan is unparalleled. Its cadence is the cadence of wind in a forest. The beauty of the dirge, rising and falling in its pity and passion, comes to us tremulous and forlorn. The threnody bears upon its wings the savagery of man and the tenderness of man. It is proud and desolate. It is like the calling of a swift-flying osprey; it is like the moaning of a lion bereft of his fellow. Deep human emotion, an awareness of the objective world, an awareness of nature, all are called upon to rouse our hearts. It manifests a fine artistic mastery, but at the same time is natural as rain, natural as the breaking of surging waves upon tide-stained substructures. 'The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you. . . . Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon

your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!'

It was this shepherd-poet, beloved by Saul, beloved by Jonathan, beloved by Joab, beloved by the 'three mighties,' beloved by Michal, beloved by Abigail, beloved by Bathsheba, and beloved by God, who successfully converted a scattered people into a single people, the borders of whose land he made to extend from the Red Sea to the river Euphrates. We must remember, however, while reading the accounts of King David's and King Solomon's greatness, as related by the Jews, that in actual fact the brief hour of the nation's glory was allowed to happen, so to speak, by sufferance only. From a wider view of history 'this feeble people' was wedged in geographically between two prominent and powerful empires which could, at any time, had they put their minds to it, have swallowed these tribesmen up. The Hebrews were like mice constructing a cockle nest of straw between the paws of two drowsy

griffins. It was inevitable sooner or later that either Egypt or Assyria would yawn and rouse herself up. It was not possible, and indeed it was not in the womb of time, that this insignificant nomadic troop should become a great world-power. Their victory was to be upon another plane. The faith that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai was the true gift they had to offer, the living trust that each descendant of Abraham held close to his heart. For this infirm and fickle people cherished strange secrets, secrets of more uncommon consequence for the future development of the human race than the memory of great empires has ever been.

Certainly Abigail spoke not far from the truth when she declared that the soul of David was 'bound in the bundle of life with the Lord.' His vitality was tremendous, and his confidence unmeasured. Only once was this confidence in God shaken, and that on the occasion of the king's bringing the Ark up to Jerusalem. The Ark had been placed on a new cart; and as the vehicle was being drawn along the rough mountain-road, one of the oxen stumbled. Seeing the shrine totter, a driver put out his hand to steady it, and immediately was punished by death, after the manner of

the inquisitive reapers. The unexpectedness of so wilful a punishment seems to have terrified David. His religious jubilation was transformed to an uneasy suspicion, and he directed that the sacred object should be 'carried aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite,' and three whole months passed before he summoned up enough courage to resume his original purpose. 'And David was afraid of the Lord, that day, and said, How shall the Ark of the Lord come to me?' At last, with Levites to help him, he brought the sacrosanct chest up to Jerusalem. 'And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.' And a certain proud woman looked out of a window at him; and there stirred in the heart of this king's daughter, espoused for two hundred foreskins, the impious heathen irritation that is provoked in certain tough souls, even now, at any public display of religious emotion. There he was, the king of Israel, leaping and dancing before the Lord, and Saul's daughter 'looked through a window and saw King David . . . and she despised him in her heart.'

There were many sides to his nature. To secure his throne he made an excuse of a famine to deliver the seven sons of his old sovereign into the hands of the Gibeonites to be hanged upon a hill in the beginning of the barley-harvest. 'God breaks the camel to give the jackal a supper.' He mercilessly massacred the Amalekites who had burnt Ziklag, although 'these rovers' had themselves refrained from killing his wives and the wives of his men. He smote them from the twilight 'even unto the evening of the next day,' save only four hundred sons of Belial, 'which rode upon camels and fled.' At the time of the spring, 'when kings go forth to battle,' he stayed behind in Jerusalem, to idle after a woman he could see washing herself from the roof of his palace. He penned a letter to his general, saying, 'Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die. . . . Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another.' And yet it was this same man who stumbled up to his chamber over the gate, blind with tears, crying out to the dead rebel who had all but cost him his kingdom: 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son.'

In an old Jewish book there may be read the following beautiful passage: 'Old age must be venerated and cherished though broken in mind or memory, just as the broken tables of the law were kept in the Ark.' At seventy, David was already feeble. 'They covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat.' The elders of his house were alarmed. At last they bethought them of a novel expedient. They searched the kingdom for a young virgin; for, they said, 'let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat.' Good luck to such sweet ague-weeds for the plague of eld! But he who had heard 'the sound of a going' in the tops of the mulberry trees, who had been the leader of men who could throw stones as easily with the left hand as with the right, was unable, even in the hour of death, to rid his mind from the thoughts of man-slaughter. 'O deliver not the soul of thy turtle dove unto the multitude of the wicked.' The last words he spoke to Solomon his son were words of blood. Joab, his faithful captain, who had been his lifelong companion in battle, was now 'named' by him for his offence in supporting the pretensions of Adonijah. 'Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.' Nor did his decrepit mind forget the

grudge he bore to Shimei, the son of Gera, who on the day of his flight from Jerusalem had followed him along a bank of the Mount of Olives, throwing stones at him and casting dirt, and saying, 'Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial . . . behold thou art taken in thy mischief because thou art a bloody man.' This old count was not forgotten. 'Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood.' So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.

It was King Solomon who built the temple on the hill Moriah. Until this time the divine presence had been content to hover over the Ark like a hawk, like a sacred kestrel hawk, which with quivering horizontal wings had followed the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Years ago, at Montacute, I remember being told by Fred Chant, the timber-man, as we waited under the acacia tree on the top lawn, that the wood of this particular tree was better than any other for making handles for hatchets and axes. As with complete unconcern a humming-moth passed from

one to the other of the crimson geranium flowers, I might that day have instructed my friend as to still another use to which the good timber had been put. But now the treasured cabinet, of the size of a child's coffin, of the size of a god's cradle, was no longer allowed to remain in the tabernacle in Ophel. It was carried up and placed in the Holy of Holies of the new temple, and if we are to believe the priestly Deuteronomic writer, the Shekinah, the presence of God descended in a cloud upon it, in a cloud so dense that the white-robed priests could scarcely perform the offices of their calling. Then spake Solomon, 'The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness,' for by that sign he knew that he had built a settled place for the Deity 'to abide in for "ever." ' It had been a heavy task. Thousands upon thousands of lumbermen had been at work in the upper glades of Lebanon felling trees for God's house. In a hundred upland valleys mighty root-trunks presenting their kerfs to the Sidonian moon were all that remained of the glory of the forests. The timber had been dragged down to the Mediterranean at Tyre, and floated from there to Joppa. Thousands upon thousands of foreign masons had been occupied in cutting the great stones, so scrupulously prepared before the

actual building began. Archæologists digging deep below the present walls of Jerusalem have before now come upon these enormous squared and oblong blocks, which with dumb patience have supported the ponderous structures above them through the terrible years, blocks with the mason-marks of the Phœnicians still visible upon their backs. The actual building of the temple was begun in the month of Zif, and was finished seven years later in the month of Bul. It stood for four hundred years, the pride and the glory of the nation. The tradition of it preserved, and has yet preserved, the integrity of the Jews as a peculiar and separate people. It was the house of God. Butcher-birds have their nests, wayside weasels their crooked habitations, men abide in caves, in tents, in houses of stone, and this, and none other, was the dwelling-place of God. It was to this familiar building, opposite the Mount of Olives, that he found his way when he came in out of the wild, cold spaces to contemplate and to administer the affairs of our planet. Just as the cormorant, with black neck outstretched, will fly untutored to its own particular roosting-place stained white with its morning excrement, so the mysterious being by whose breath we are maintained knew

with complete precognition the hoary pile on the dusty hill.

Yet Solomon, when the great day arrived for the dedication of the temple, rightly understood that the sacred mansion formed only, as it were, a sanctified platform. It was a glorious stage upon the gibbous earth from which appeals could be made by men coming up to the place in chariots, and upon the backs of asses, and upon sandalled feet. On that day of favour he openly qualified the presumption of his original claim. When he kneeled down before all the congregation of Israel, spreading out his hands to bless them, the subtle Oriental sovereign showed no overweening confidence. Well he surmised that these stones, decorated so cunningly with open flowers, with palm trees, and with knops, could not of a certainty be said to hold the mysterious spirit he worshipped. Even then, as he prayed by the rough rock of the Dome, amidst all the proud furniture of the place, with the bronze sea, the twelve travelling lavers, the flesh-hooks, the snuffers, the spoons, and the censers of fine gold about him, he felt stir in his heart a deep religious mistrust. 'But will God in very deed dwell with men upon the earth? behold, heaven and the heavens of

heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built.' He had said it. At best the great temple he had built was but a place to pray in, a fortunate vantage-point from which to catch the ear of God on untoward occasions, such as when the industrious tillers of the Syrian soil were tormented by the presence of mildew, locusts, or caterpillars, or when their hearts were troubled and they spread forth *their* hands knowing 'their own sore and their own grief.' And when the ceremony was over, the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night-time, giving him the assurance he desired. And he said: 'I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for a place of sacrifice. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; if my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now mine eyes shall be open, and my ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.'

The Hebrews, as a nation, have ever been impressed by wealth and worldly grandeur, and

their new king jumped well with their humour. Throughout the long ages, Solomon in all his glory has cast a spell over their imaginations. And in truth, as the world goes, he was a singular and significant prince. In his days 'Judah and Israel were many as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry.' The young monarch, his hair powdered with gold dust, would ride out to his gardens of Etham adorned in purple. The provisions for his table were liberal; besides fatted fowl, harts, roebucks, and fallow deer, 'ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures,' were his supplies for a single day. And the magnificence of his royal background was well offset by his personal attainments. Here, if ever, was a master of 'wise cracks.' 'He spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. He spake parables about all the trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall.' There was no beast or fowl or creeping thing or finned fish the habits of which he did not search out with an insatiable curiosity. The devils also occupied his attention, and he caught them and caged them in crypts, and tortured them. If they sought to conceal themselves in the body of

any man, he knew, none better, how to draw them forth through the nostrils:

'Hail to the Lord's anointed,
Great David's greater son!'

And the fame of Solomon spread over the whole earth. Ambassadors came to him from the land 'shadowing with wings' in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters. He established harbours on the Red Sea, and with the help of Hiram, king of Tyre, sent out his navies to fetch to him all the treasures of the East, ivories and apes and peacocks! It was his pastime to invent riddles, and he tested his ingenuity upon his visitors, upon his friend Hiram, and upon the Queen of Sheba. Indeed, when this queen from southern Arabia listened to his wisdom, and saw all his chariots, and saw the stalls and stables provided for his horses and dromedaries, with barley for their cribs and straw for their litter, she stood still in amazement; and when, on Sabbaths and new moons, she waited, watching the great king going up to pray like some plumed Pantagruel 'by the ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord,' there was no more spirit left in her.

Solomon, as Josephus puts it, was 'mad' after women. He had married Pharaoh's daughter, but he did not allow this alliance to limit the scope of his amorous experience. Seven hundred other princesses and three hundred concubines were also present for his diversion; and these women, selected from the daughters of Israel, and from the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites, caused his heart to be 'not perfect with the Lord his God.' For each one persuaded him to build an altar to her own especial deity, to Chemosh, and Ashtaroth, and a hundred other 'foul idle shrines,' upon the Mount of Offence. 'For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb.'

In his day silver became as common as stone, and cedar as common as sycamore. 'Care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches' betrayed him, and for his own aggrandizement he chastised the people with whips, raising levies from them, and taxing all those who were not his 'men of war, nor chiefs of his captains, nor captains of his chariots and horsemen,' until they sweated and groaned under his oppression. For this man, who, as a young prince, had been content to be crowned riding on the croup of his father's mule, came by little good of his horses, 'brought out of

Egypt,' together with chapmen carrying 'linen yarn.'

Many legends have grown up about him. It is reported that one day, when he was walking in his garden, he noticed a strange sapling, the name of which he did not know. In his wisdom, being able to communicate with the vegetable world, he asked the plant what it was called. And the plant answered that it was called carob. And Solomon said: 'That sounds to me an odd name. What does it mean?' And the carob answered pertly enough: 'It means destruction, because I shall live to be instrumental in thy fall.' King Solomon sat himself down upon his cucumber-frame, contemplating the ill-speaking sprout in silence, and then presently went off to his gardener's potting-shed to give instructions that the carob should be watered and manured with especial care. Meanwhile, he reentered his palace to continue his favourite diversion of riddle-making and riddle-taking. And the Queen of Sheba inquired of Solomon how it would be possible to pass a thread through the tiny aperture of a twisted shell. And Solomon called to him a white maggot, and the creature, subservient to his wisdom, took the thread in her teeth and achieved the convoluted passage. In reward, the worm was

told that she could go and do anything that her heart desired, and without a moment's hesitation she set off for the king's garden to lodge herself under the bark of the young carob. And when the tree grew to an appropriate size, the king, not unmindful of the discourse he had had with it, went out and with the utmost deliberation cut it down, converting it into a walking-stick, upon which, as the years passed, he was accustomed to lean more and more heavily. Now it was the habit of the king to pay visits to the dungeons where he kept devils labouring as masons upon stones for his buildings. And their occupation was extremely distasteful to them; yet for fear of their master they dared not rest from their chipping. And as Solomon sat on his accustomed seat, he suddenly died: but leaning as he was with his head upon his hand and his hand upon his staff, the carob tree supported him. Time passed and still the devils worked, thinking to themselves that their master now proposed never to take his eyes from off them. They laboured on, cursing under their breath and casting furtive glances at the bowed, silent figure in their midst. But at last the white maggot had done her work, and the carob-staff broke, and the body of their royal persecutor fell on to the flagstones, and they

knew that he was dead; and with many a chirp and whistle they clambered out of the windows, as jocund as chaffinches, to go to their own place.

The prophets! What images of terror, of old men covered with mantles, of monstrous lean men with loins girded up and eyes flashing, does this word evoke! They appear, these terrific forms, now here, now there, like beings possessed, like whirlwind spirits. Nothing could quench their flaming belief in Jehovah, who more and more came to represent for them the omniscient, omnipotent God, not only of Israel, but of all the nations. Although to begin with their prophetic zeal confined itself to maintaining the purity of their Hebrew worship, yet, as the generations passed, it widened its range until such qualities as justice and compassion came to be included amongst the attributes in harmony with the divine purpose. Many of us believe this faith to have been a delusion. Many of us deny that the finer impulses of men and women are under the divine providence of a transcendent God, those impulses that tremble so shyly amid the ferocities of life. That a certain path of conduct, a personal way, should be followed, irrespective of

rewards and punishments, and, indeed, with complete indifference to every form of conventional morality, was, and is still, far from being received as sound doctrine. Many years have yet to go by before it will be understood that a virtue which derives its strength from incomprehensible assumptions, is, in its essence, a sorry, unreliable virtue, and that any real delicacy of spirit, any true perceptiveness and understanding, must be purged of the least taint of 'moralic acid.' The most treasured goodness in this world is not unselfish goodness, not Christian goodness, but that selfless, unoffended, imaginative sympathy, that princely, heathen goodness, which, in well-bred spirits, is as sensitive as the lovely waving feelers of a sea-anemone. This simple goodness, sometimes miraculously evident in the houses of tinkers and tailors, kings and cobblers, causes tears of joy to start in the eyes of men. A soul cannot be saved by following the laws of Moses alone. These rudimentary regulations answered their purpose well enough in their day. Yet a finer tenderness remains, a more discriminating moral susceptibility, which their discipline does not satisfy. By taking away 'the sodomites out of the land,' the soul of Asa was not sufficiently justified. His

heart was perfect with the Lord all his days. 'Nevertheless, in the time of his old age he was diseased in the feet.'

As we read the sonorous pages of these great chapters, it is impossible to remain unaffected by their power. The insolent claim that the children of Israel were brought up out of Egypt by two golden calves presently presents itself to our minds also as an intolerable travesty of the truth. A few chapters read, and we are in a fit mood to welcome the sudden appearance of the most terrifying of all the ancients. Let there be an end, once and for ever, to this halting between two opinions. Like a clap of thunder, Elijah, the Tishbite, bursts upon the scene with a magnetic violence that can cause the very elements to bend to his will. 'As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.' The prophet had spoken, and the Lord commanded him to hide by the brook Cherith, himself instructing the ravens, with their understanding round eyes, to abandon their daily occupation of scouring the hillside for the afterbirths of sheep, and to concentrate all their ingenious, far-seeing purposes upon fetching food for the prophet.

Three years pass, and Ahab and his steward have themselves been reduced to searching for grass for their mules, 'that we lose not all the beasts.' Then Elijah suddenly reappeared to the God-fearing Obadiah. 'Go tell thy Lord, Behold Elijah is here.' Obadiah hesitated, and immediately the prophet answered with haughty foolhardihood: 'As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to-day.' It was a daring resolution. Search had been made for him far and near, and he was now welcomed by Ahab with the significant words, 'Art thou he that troubleth Israel?' However, the personal power of the hirsute man 'with a girdle of leather about his loins,' who had started up out of the highway, was sufficiently strong to dominate the weak-willed king, and he obeyed his orders. A decree was issued that all Israel and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were to gather upon the eastern ridge of Mount Carmel.

'I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord.' There it was that the great trial took place, and there below, by the banks of the river Kishon, Elijah, like David before him, making use of the uncertain temper of men's minds at a period of universal disaster, caused the unfortunate rival

priests to be massacred. 'The Lord he is God; the Lord he is God.'

When, in the month of May, we sons of a righteous father, sons of Eli, used to read the magnificent passage at the brass lectern, I never imagined that it would be my lot to visit the stony terrace where Elijah had mocked the false priests. It has happened so. I carry with me my memory of the historic mountain, with its glens and honeycombed dongas, with its sage and black-berried bay trees, with its slanting dew-damp rocks gleaming like plates of copper in the early sunshine. It takes over three hours to reach the place by a wild mountain-road; and from its high crest, which was once 'black with clouds and wind,' a man can look down upon the Promised Land, upon the hills of Samaria, upon the hills of Nazareth, upon the slopes of Gilboa, upon the snow-capped head of Hermon, and the lofty mountain-ranges on the other side of the Jordan.

Out of the blazing heat of noon I sought refuge in the cool, whitewashed interior of a vaulted monastery cell; and there, as I lay meditating, with an incipient fever in my blood, my attention was caught by a single picture in the room, a tawdry-coloured Catholic print representing Elijah, sword

in hand, standing with his foot upon the neck of a false priest. I regarded it at first with an interest entirely detached. Then suddenly I recognized in the narrow, bigoted, fanatical countenance of Elijah the very expression that I have seen upon the limited faces of the people who are my natural enemies. In a flash I realized that I was, and ever would be, on the side of the fallen victim, on the side of this renegade worshipper of the sun, with his shifty intellectual head and beaver-brown beard. These honest priests, who took their meat at the table of Queen Jezebel, were surely of my kidney. I could very well understand the queen's prejudice. If the truth is to be blurted out, it offered as great a release for the human spirit as did the unreasoning superstitious loyalty of the obsessed old man.

What a woman she was, this daughter of Ethbaal, priest of Astarte, dwelling in her 'ivory house'! A word from the painted lips of this 'imperious whorish woman' sufficed to send even the Tishbite going for his life, like a long-winded cantering kongoni over the hills. There is also something attractive to me about the personality of Ahab, the son of Omri, who 'did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.' I com-

mend his weakness in sparing the life of his conquered enemy, Ben-hadad, the king of the Syrians: in calling him brother and causing him 'to come up into his chariot.' I like him very well for his pithy utterances, 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' and, 'Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.' I like him for dressing in sackcloth after the matter of Naboth's vineyard, and, indeed, for wanting to have a garden of herbs at all. The guilt of this affair was not his, except in so far as 'he turned away his face and would eat no bread.' From the day of his birth, even unto the minute when the arrow 'shot at a venture' pierced the joint of his armour, he remained an amiable tool in the hands of his resplendent Phœnician spouse. It was she, as the Scripture tells us, who invariably 'stirred him up.'

How these bitter-tempered, provincial Jews hated this woman of high fashion, gloating over every detail of her misfortunes! When the chariot of her husband was backed into the pool of Jezreel, and the dogs collected to lick up the blood that was washed out of it, they rejoiced; and when her own terrible fate came upon her, they put it on record for all generations to read. 'And when

Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it, and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot. And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter. And they went to bury her; but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. . . . And he said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: and the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel.'

Different enough was the destiny reserved for her rough enemy, for the solitary holy man who had spent the days of his life in cabins and in cock-lofts, for this worthy, with but one idea fixed in

his head. It was in keeping with the imagination of the Hebrews that his fanatical spirit should at the end be translated in glory, that God should transport to heaven his stark, ferocious soul by means of a miraculous equipage. Down to the sandy banks of Jordan it came, the flaming carriage, causing Elijah's bucolic disciple, fresh from the plough, to explain in startled stupefaction, 'My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.'

Before Elijah was taken up to heaven, Elisha prayed him to let a double portion of his mighty spirit fall upon him. Elijah answered that he had asked a hard thing; and, indeed, this second great prophet never quite equalled the sombre majesty of his master. But, within limits, he preserved the great tradition. Kings, princes, and military leaders waited upon him; and for more than a generation he haunted the recesses of Mount Carmel, and prowled about over the hills of Palestine, from the Dead Sea to Damascus, an acknowledged prophet of God.

It was he that found water for the three kings when they had, in their expedition against Moab, 'fetched a compass of seven days' journey' into

the desert. It was he who assured them that they would 'smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones,' of that long-suffering country. It was he, again, who sent his servant Gehazi out of his presence 'a leper as white as snow.'

His life was an adventurous one. He was within the walls of Samaria during the shocking siege of that city by the king of Syria. It was when cannibalism was openly condoned and 'an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.' Jehoram, the king of Israel, was at his wit's end. For some reason he attributed his misfortune to Elisha's baleful influence, 'God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.' The prophet, as he sat in his house in the company of the elders, welcomed the king's messenger with the omniscient words, 'See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head.'

Politically Elisha was extremely powerful. He was a kind of Pope of the woods. It was he who sent a messenger 'with a box of oil' to anoint Jehu as he sat with his captains in Ramoth-gilead. And

well did those men of war know that communication of 'this mad fellow,' who appeared suddenly, and fled away and tarried not. 'What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts, are so many?' Small wonder Ahab's son cried out to his friend, the king of Judah, 'There is treachery, O Ahaziah,' words which sent that monarch of Jerusalem clattering off, at top speed, 'by the way of the garden-house.'

Bloody were these Hebrew revolutions. At Jehu's demand the elders of Samaria sent to Jezreel the heads of Ahab's seventy sons, 'the multiplying brood of the ungodly.' They carried them to that city in baskets, making two ghastly heaps of them 'at the entering in of the gate,' so that all that remained unto Ahab were destroyed. 'For the Lord hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah.'

Elisha lived to see the grandson of Jehu king. When the prophet was dying, he came to his bedside. The manner of Elijah's translation had evidently been spread abroad, for Joash, as he wept over the face of Elisha, reminded him of his own words, 'O my father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.' But whatever

may have been the expectations of the young king, it was not Elisha's destiny to have such honour shown him. He died and was buried. His dust, however, was proved to have an especial virtue, like the dust of dragons which the Chinese prize so highly; for when a funeral-party, disturbed by the sudden appearance of some Moabite bands, threw the corpse they were carrying into Elisha's sepulchre, it stood up on its feet as soon as it touched the dry bones of the holy man.

The next prophet to arise after Elisha was Amos. He was the first of that long line of doleful preachers who appeared, now here, now there, like bitterns booming to themselves of impending calamities. It was the passionate purpose of these solitary men, speaking 'in many parts and in many manners,' to avert the wrath from the children of Israel by turning their steps back to those paths of righteousness which they now conceived to be consonant with the will and mood of Jehovah. Through their prophetic mouths the religious genius latent in the Hebrews found its highest expression and through their articulation the devout sensibility of their national religion became refined beyond anything that had been imagined

or understood by their fathers. They resembled inspired diviners, and inevitably their holly-staffs curved toward the living water.

It was as though the unprecedented scale of King Solomon's peace-offerings, two-and-twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep, had once and for ever freed their minds from the bondage of that most primitive form of worship.

'The Gods smelt the savour,
The Gods smelt the goodly savour;
The Gods gathered like flies over the sacrificer.'

Ritual and the rites of sacrifice the prophets no longer regarded. The heart, the heart of man, was now their care. The stability and permanence of the ancient covenant depended, so they believed, upon such a national conversion. True piety, they affirmed, consisted in the practical application of simple and elementary virtues in the conduct of the nation's life. Especially did they condemn every form of oppression, and each of them, in turn, became a champion for the cause of the poor. That a common herdsman like Amos, who came from a village near Bethlehem, situated on a bare and

rocky hill, should have developed so sure a consciousness of moral issues, is a matter difficult to explain. It is as natural to Jews to be 'God-intoxicated' as for frogs to swim; that is all that can be said. They suck in the dangerous liquor with the milk from the paps of their mothers.

The backsliding of the children of Israel was to the prophets a constant cause of complaint. 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' Their fine poetic rhapsodies largely consist in invocations of the evils which they hoped would shortly overwhelm their neighbours, and which they feared also would overwhelm themselves unless they looked better to their going. 'This chance' was always left open; and some of their most beautiful chapters are concerned with describing a beatific state of undisturbed peace, to be inaugurated at some future time, a state of blessed peace which it can hardly be said that the Jews as yet have been privileged to enjoy.

Amos lived in the days when Uzziah was king of Judah. This lord of Jerusalem was a leper, and resided in 'a several' house. He had, however, a taste for husbandry, breeding much cattle, both in the high country and in the plains. It may have

been in the capacity of a king's herdsman that Amos was brought in touch with the corruption of the kingdom. Suddenly, without warning, the word of the Lord came from the mouth of this rude gatherer of fig mulberries, this cattleman. No longer did he spend time each evening dividing black goats from white sheep. No longer did the neat for which he was responsible feel the weight of his hazel-switch. In godlike wrath he passed out of the hillside bomas, and with the salubrious stench of grass-dung about him, made his way to Bethel. At Bethel was the 'king's chapel' and one of the golden calves that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had set up. And there they heard him. From there the voice of the inspired drover echoed over the land like the lowing of one of his own cows for the offspring of her bowels. In that hour the soul of Amos outleapt all boundaries; and, with his horn to his lips, he sounded a blast which, clear and true and burdened with an insupportable message, reaches our ears to-day. 'The Lord will roar from Zion . . . because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes,' because they 'store up violence and robbery in their palaces,' because they 'oppress the poor, and crush the needy,' because they make 'the ephah small, and the shekel

great, falsifying the balances by deceit,' because 'their treading is upon the poor and they take from him burdens of wheat.' Heavy indeed lies the load of Hebrew iniquity upon the conscience of God. 'I am pressed under you,' he cries, 'as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves. . . . The Lord will roar from Zion. . . . Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! . . . The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.' The Lord will smite once and not again. He will destroy the winter house with the summer house. He will send blasting and mildew and the 'palmer-worm' upon the land. He will take them away with hooks and their posterity 'with fish-hooks.' If they attempt an escape, attempt to hide themselves in the bay-tree hollows of Mount Carmel, he will 'search them out'; if they dive to the bottom of the Mediterranean, 'I will command the serpent, and he shall bite them.' Only a remnant shall outlive the divine indignation, 'as the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear.'

In awful vision he sees the God of Abraham standing upon a wall, plumb-line in hand, and by

this token he knows the people to be separated from their God. What matters all their singing in Solomon's great temple of white stone? It shall be turned to 'howlings.' 'Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts.' Small wonder there were attempts to suppress his outcry. The sound of such mischievous madness was evil hearing in the corridors of kings, in priests' palaces. 'O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there.' Can the word of God be dammed up as men dam up a river? Back into their teeth came the stockman's answer, and it was more than they looked for. 'Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith the Lord: Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land; and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land. . . . I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.' Only by turning to God could they hope to be saved, by turning to the God whose

awful existence had been revealed to Amos as he meditated amongst the rocks of his hillside. There he had known him. There he had comprehended him, the great one, the ruler of men, he who had created the host of heaven, the great figure of Orion rising to the eastward, and the delicate jewel-lights of the seven stars in the constellation of the Pleiades, mounting to the zenith with so still and tender a tread on winter nights.

'Seek the Lord, and ye shall live. . . . Hate the evil, and love the good.' So, and not otherwise, will the days be hastened when 'the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed: and the mountains shall drop sweet wine. . . . And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.'

Close upon the heels of the prophet Amos came the prophet Micah; and his parable was much the same. Like owls, their calling was not dissimilar. Hoot upon hoot they answered each other across the ignorant night: the one from the carob trees of Philistia, the other from the terebinth trees of Bethel. 'The Lord hath a controversy with his

people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee?'

The best of the children of Israel are 'as a brier,' the most upright 'sharper than a thorn hedge. . . . That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up. . . . They covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away. . . . Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? . . . Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds! . . . Make thee bald, and poll thee for thy delicate children; enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee.' And yet the same chance still remains, if Israel will but hearken. 'He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' And if they can be persuaded to do this little thing, then God will pass by their transgressions and will pardon their iniquity and 'the nations shall see and be confounded. . . . They shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf.

They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth.'

Already, it seems, there was a stir in the brain-pans of these early men, inklings of the great future of the Hebrews. It has been the custom to find in these ancient verses strange rumours. It is the childish belief of many, even to this day, that these seers were actually allowed to view, 'as through a glass darkly,' the events of history before ever the scroll of time was unrolled. Christians have been at pains to read into these old sounding sentences I know not what meanings. They are a gentry not to be trusted. They are like the furriers of New York City, willy-nilly they will stretch and clip their pelts to the required pattern. They will pull and tussle at both ends of the parchment at once, straining the texts of the Old Testament to fit those of the New which have already been well trimmed to their purpose. But when all of their nice interpretations have been discounted, there yet remains clearly audible, even to the most critical reader, a deep underswell of national prevision, confident and unabashed.

And the greatest of all the prophets who have

held their ears to the ground was the great poet of Zion, Isaiah. The genius of this man, who for three years walked half-naked through the streets of Jerusalem, is stamped upon the pages of his composite book. His spirit gathered upon its wings the spirit of his race. His imagination rose like a bird out of the dark alley-ways and left far behind the flat, shining roofs of the ancient city. The force of his oracular utterance never alters; and the accumulated power of his great chapters causes us to stand in a daze, as though we had suddenly been allowed to hear the very music of the earnest constellations. Now it is a dirge that carries us down, down, and ever down; now it is an high melody, carrying us up, up, and ever upwards into a sun-radiant sky sounding with orisons. 'I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.' Before the words of this man – and those contributed by his inspired collaborator – Matter, that monstrous monster, cowers and loosens his clutch. 'In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent.'

I find I can read, with no small content, of the burden of Tyre, of the burden of Moab, of the burden of Idumea, of the burden of Damascus, and

of the burden of Egypt, 'the basest of the kingdoms'; but I confess to not liking it so well when Isaiah turns his attention toward the more favoured daughters of Jerusalem. Something carnal in my nature smells out an unsavoury and soured envy in his vicious and unseemly words. Because the daughters of Zion are gay, and their dark eyes wanton, because their manners are provocative and they make a tinkling with their little feet, 'therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts.' Out upon it! Well do we know the tenement-house prison to which these words lead, with its bread of affliction and water of affliction. If the Lord takes away their nose-jewels, their wimples, and crisping-pins, we will give them back again. They shall have their scarlet cloaks. When the bats flicker in the darkening alleys, they shall be at liberty to go where they will with their young men, 'in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night.' 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. . . . There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not.' Verily they shall be permitted to know that sweet fourth wonder unto its furthermost fainting ex-

tremity. And it shall come to pass that instead of a stink there shall be a sweet smell; and instead of a rent, a girdle; and instead of baldness, well-set hair; and instead of a girding of sackcloth, a stomacher; and instead of burning, beauty.

With what fine imaginative strokes he can evoke the desolation of great cities brought to destruction. Of the end of Babylon he writes: 'It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there'; and of the end of the fenced city of Idumea: 'None shall pass through it for ever and ever. But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it. . . . They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there; . . . and thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls. The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; . . . there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate.'

In the Book of Amos there is this curious verse: 'Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the

people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?' Certain verses in Isaiah, with their tone of taunting malice, with their tone of conscious morose wickedness, help to illuminate its obscurity. 'Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee *in their perfection*.'

Isaiah is never weary of condemning that base energetic impulse in man, the existence of which seems to be essential for the economic health of society. 'Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!' His care, like the care of Amos and Micah, is also for the heart of man. The Deutero-Isaiah makes Jehovah say: 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? Saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. . . . The new moons, and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot

away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. . . . He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man.' Even in those early far-off years the practice of sacrificing living creatures was beginning to be recognized for what it was, a survival of the twilight superstitions of primitive man, a survival destined later to have so extravagant a recrudescence in Christian theology. 'Being justified by *His* blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him!' 'We have redemption through *His* blood, the forgiveness of sins.' 'They washed their robes and made them white in the *blood* of the lamb.' Fasting and worship were now counted of little value unless the heart was pure. 'Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness? to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him?' It is a thing to marvel at that the sure instinct of humanity, of unregenerate

self-interested humanity, should have conserved such words even as an inspired whisper. We remain still in a 'gross darkness' and are content; yet an uncertainty, a doubt, has prompted us perhaps to retain so uncommon a hint. And what, forsooth, has come over the thundering backside God of Moses that he should begin to worry himself about widows and orphans, and brood over suchlike small fry, and all suddenly turn into the God of the off-scourings of the earth? 'Fear not, thou worm Jacob. . . . I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.'

And what a sense of consolation comes with Jehovah's relenting. It matters not whether these words were uttered by Isaiah himself or by his great successor, a man with an imagination akin to his. It is the same. 'Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion. . . . Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. . . . Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem. . . . Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms

of my hands.' Here are brave words for the descendants of the Neanderthal man, for the descendants of the Stone Age man, to carry in moleskin phylacteries about their foreheads. No longer need they look aghast upon the 'coal-sacks' of outer space. A good tinker has riveted serviceable bottoms to those holes of treachery. We and our children need blink with fear no longer, never again have cause to quail, no, not until 'all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their hosts shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.'

King Solomon reigned some forty years and died towards the middle of the tenth century. The period of the divided kingdoms lasted until the year 587 B.C., when Zedekiah was carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. The epoch makes sorrowful reading. The turbulent inclinations of the Hebrews had been held in check under the 'thick loins' of their great king. Also Solomon had introduced foreign ways and manners, and by this means had succeeded in modifying the crude disposition of his people. After his death they relapsed into their old ways,

and there followed this interval of four centuries, during which the two small kingdoms, weakened by their jealous rivalry, suffered one long series of invasions from the neighbouring tribes and nations that compassed them about 'like bees.' The tradition of their national religion was preserved as by a miracle, largely, as we have seen, by the efforts of the prophets.

The first severe blow to the Hebrew pride occurred when Shishak, a Pharaoh of the twenty-second dynasty, captured Jerusalem and removed all the treasures of the temple and of the king's house, together with the celebrated 'shields of gold.' Meanwhile, the Syrian kings of Damascus pressed hard upon the northern tribes, invasions that were superseded by those of the Assyrians, who eventually 'swallowed up' the northern kingdom in the year 721 B.C. After a long siege, they stormed the city of Samaria and removed its inhabitants to Nineveh, to that 'lair of lions, the bloody city, the city gorged with prey.' This remnant never returned. They were utterly lost. 'They are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself.'

For one hundred and thirty-one years longer

the southern kingdom survived, its position each decade becoming more and more precarious. Perhaps the circumstances can be best indicated by a scene that took place before the walls of Jerusalem in the reign of Hezekiah. This excellent king had rebelled against the Assyrians, to whom he had been paying tribute. Sennacherib, after his victory at Altaqu, sent three captains to reason with him. These captains arrived before the gates of Jerusalem and called for Hezekiah to come out upon the walls so that he could hear what they had to say. The king refused to do this, but sent three trusted ministers. Below the fortifications of the famous city were gathered the cohorts of the greatest power of the East, shining 'in silver and gold,' and in the midst stood the Rabshakeh, or military official, the appointed spokesman for Sennacherib. No sovereign nation has ever been more brutal, more savage, than the Assyrians. These fighters, I tell you, trusted only to brute force. They liked best to flay their enemies, carrying off human skins as though they were the pelts of wild beasts, heavy and dripping. The obstinate resistance of Jerusalem appeared to them the veriest folly. And the representative of the empire which had 'eaten up the East' lifted up his helmeted head, and, wagging

his square-cut beard twisted with curls, inquired of the three friends of Hezekiah the reason of their king's foolhardihood. 'What confidence is this wherein thou trusteth: saying, I have counsel and strength for the war?' He suspected them of relying upon Egypt for assistance, and in no uncertain language assured them of the danger of resting their hopes on any monarch as unreliable as Pharaoh. 'Behold, thou trusteth upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it.' His eloquence provoked no answer. He then went closer into the matter, the shrewd intelligence of this materialist divining that some supernatural sentiment must be at the bottom of their policy. He had had experience with that kind of irrational fanaticism before. He now openly challenged them with trusting in the power of their peculiar God, and with the subtlety of an Oriental, loudly asserted in the hearing of all that he himself had been sent by Jehovah to take Jerusalem. This cynical suggestion was calculated to disturb the confidence of the common people, always seeking for a sign by which they could trace beforehand the inscrutable movements of Fate. The three Hebrew spokesmen, recognizing this danger, petitioned the Rabshakeh

to speak in the Syrian language, so that the rabble would not be able to understand what he was saying. The Rabshakeh was not slow to get their point. An anger rose up in his heart against these bigoted leaders. 'Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? Hath he not sent me to the men which sit on the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss, with you?' And after this gross outburst he raised his voice even louder and made a direct appeal to the Hebrew populace. 'Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria. . . . Let not Hezekiah deceive you. . . . Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of Assyria. . . . Thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern.' He indicated that they were not alone in worshipping a national god. 'Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and

Ivah? Have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand?'

It was one of the most striking occasions when the impassioned, mulish Hebrews came in direct contact with the practical, matter-of-fact outer world; and, as at many a future crisis, the Jews remained unmoved, holding blindly, against all reason, to their monomania. 'But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word.' In the history of the world these Hebrews have played the part of abnormal children who have refused to conform to acknowledged rules. Again and again, as the centuries have passed over their heads, they have, for the sake of their fixed idea, submitted their bodies to the most atrocious persecutions. Their wilfulness has become a byword. The greatest, the wisest of the world's rulers have stood baffled and at a loss before this possessed people, this people of 'the holy seed,' who seem actually to have been branded with some peculiar branding outside the comprehension of ordinary humanity. Sennacherib had to content himself with his vain boast, 'I shut him [Hezekiah] up like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his royal city.' And Hezekiah's confidence on this occasion seems to have been justified. 'O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest

between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.' The prayers of Hezekiah have a fine quality about them. What noble words to be placed over a man's grave would those be when he begs God not to deprive him of the residue of his years! 'For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee.'

According to the Bible, the idolatries of Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, were directly responsible for the final overthrow. His superstitions surpassed those of all preceeding Hebrew kings. He reared up altars to Baal, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and observed times, and made enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards. He also set up a sanctuary to the god Moloch, in the dismal valley of Hinnom, beyond the gate of potsherds to the south of Jerusalem, and here he sacrificed living children. His reign was followed by the reign of his grandson, who was another 'good king' like Hezekiah. This man did all that he could to propitiate Jehovah. He even went so far as to 'brake down the houses of

the sodomites, that were by the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the grove.' He also desecrated the heathen altars by burning the bones of their priests upon them; and all of their images he stamped to powder 'at the brook Kidron,' the idols of gold, that they made each one to himself to worship, he cast 'to the moles and to the bat.' Nothing availed to avert the awful day of the Lord's wrath. Manasseh had shed 'innocent blood,' and at that early time the shedding of innocent blood was by no means acceptable to God. The Lord roared out at Zion: 'I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.'

His actions fitted his words, for Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, the great ruler of the Chaldeans, came up against Zedekiah, the last king of Judah; and in spite of the attempted intervention of Pharaoh Hophra, he threw down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt the temple and the king's house and all the houses of the people. And he caught Zedekiah, and after cutting down his sons before his face, he put out his eyes and bound him with fetters of brass and carried him to Babylon, together with the princes and men of valour, and the craftsmen, and the smiths. He carried away

also the firepans, the bases, the brazen sea, 'the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons,' and, indeed, all that was of any value in the house of the Lord. And none remained of the children of Israel in Palestine, 'save the poor of the land, to be vine-dressers and husbandmen.'

'And I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger.'

The last years before the captivity are inseparably associated with the prophet Jeremiah. This man was born at Anathoth, a village five miles north of Jerusalem, and was perhaps descended from the priestly family of Abiathar, whom King Solomon had banished to this obscure place. The chief purpose of Jeremiah's teaching was to warn the Hebrews of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. It was a message he reiterated in season and out of season, until the ears of all his contemporaries grew hot with nervous irritation. It was his business also to explain the reason why the God of Israel was devising this mischief. His explanation was similar to that which Isaiah had offered.

The children of Israel had gone 'whoring' after other gods. That was their chief offence. The mere thought of it filled the whole being of Jehovah with uncontrollable fury. It was as though a sand-fly had crawled up his nostril to sting and re-sting his brain, as though a sun-midge had got into one of his ear-holes, until he danced and stamped. That these men, whom he had selected above all others as a chosen people, as an especial people through whose medium he proposed to reveal his purposes to the rest of mankind, should deliberately turn from him to worship idols, nothings, scraps of silly matter, maypoles 'upright as the palm tree,' empty scarecrows, stuck all over with nails, 'that must needs be borne because they cannot go!' 'Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid.' He marked also their deviation from the paths of right-doing. They could not easily be forgiven for their dishonesty, their perversion of justice, their oppression of the poor. Excuses and protestations of innocence he discounted offhand. He had observed them. He knew them now. He recognized them for what they were, wild asses in the wilderness, snuffing up the wind at their pleasure.

To drive home the fact that this time he was

really about to practise evil, God devised certain explicit illustrations. For example, he sent Jeremiah to the banks of the Euphrates, instructing him to bury a linen girdle there, and then after an interval made him go back to the place and uncover the girdle, all marred and begrimed by its contact with the soil. After just such a manner would he mar and begrime his people. At another time he sent the prophet to a potter's house, so that he might liken the Hebrews to an ill-made pot. Again, he ordered Jeremiah to go about Jerusalem with a wooden ox-yoke on his neck, and with harness upon his limbs, so that the inhabitants might be constantly reminded of the treatment that they were to expect from the king of Babylon. These significant antics were by no means welcome to his fellow-countrymen. They grew weary unto death of this godly man in their midst who did nothing but croak of disaster. 'This man ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place.'

The people of Anathoth threatened to kill him, the people of Jerusalem set him in the stocks, nay, worse, let him down by cords into a dungeon where he was like to have died in the filth and mire which had accumulated at its bottom. These treatments caused Jeremiah to despair utterly. He grew

weary of suffering such rebukes. 'Cursed,' he cried, 'be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad.' It counted for naught to be told that God had sanctified him for his ministry before he came out of the womb. 'Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee.' Had he been able he would have gladly forsworn his high privilege. He was ill-pleased with his vocation, tired to death of 'rising early' and being sent to stand in all the gates of Jerusalem and the 'broad places thereof,' tired to death of seeing visions of 'naughty figs' which could not be eaten, 'they were so bad.'

But the word of the Lord was upon him, and he could not hold his tongue, he could not be silent. 'His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forebearing, and I could not stay.' He could not stay, the burning fire burst forth from him in words of dolour and in words of splendour and wrath. He saw 'a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north.' He saw a lion coming up 'from his thicket,' and Jerusalem filled with the enemy as with currant-moth caterpillars. 'Lo, I will bring a

nation upon you from afar, O house of Israel, saith the Lord: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not. . . . Behold he shall come up as clouds and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles.'

Jeremiah's eloquence weighed heavily upon the mind of Zedekiah. The king fed him on bread from the 'bakers' street' and listened to his prophecies with an apprehensive eagerness. Surely, he said in his heart, this man is conversant with the plans of God, with the devices devised by the great one who has 'made the earth, the man and the beasts that are upon the ground.' He implored the prophet to hide nothing from him. And Jeremiah communicated to him the truth, and discoursed to him of the lamentable fall of the city, and told the king that he, Zedekiah, would stand before Nebuchadnezzar, and that 'thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak to thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon.' Much the same song had come already into Jerusalem from the mouth of the priestly Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, sitting in exile at Tel-abib in southern Babylonia. Yet there was hope, perhaps, in the disagreement of the two predictions,

for Ezekiel told that Zedekiah should never *see* Babylon. Perfidious oracles, who could unravel them! Without eyes, how could Zedekiah *see* the walls of that ancient city?

And Jeremiah once more lifted up his voice and railed against the disobedient people who had 'forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.' They had whores' foreheads, they refused to be ashamed. 'They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife. . . . They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked. . . . They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. . . . They bend their tongues like their bow for lies. . . . As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit. . . . The crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord. . . . The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven.' Little does it boot them to repeat, as though it were an incantation: 'The Temple of the Lord. The Temple of the Lord. The Temple of the Lord.' God is not unacquainted with their adulteries, and neighings,

and the lewdness of their whoredoms. 'Therefore thus saith the Lord: Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.'

In his indignation, from his miry prison Jeremiah exhorts God to avenge him upon his countrymen. 'Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.' Bring down their houses 'ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion,' let them be 'buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.' Let them take the wine-cup of God's fury from his hand. 'Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you.' For, behold, I will send Nebuchadnezzar 'my servant,' and he will utterly 'destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing and perpetual desolations,' and they that were brought up in scarlet shall 'embrace dung-hills' and 'all that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying,

Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty. The joy of the whole earth?'

Then, as it was with the prophet Isaiah, his fierce denunciations suddenly become changed into songs of deliverance. He, also, piercing the darkened valleys of the future with clear eye, envisages the light of a new day. In his head there move premonitions of an approaching restoration. 'Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north.' In their desperate affliction the pride of the Hebrews *invented the idea of the coming of the Messiah.* It was begotten as the compensating wish of a haughty people brought down to the dust. Now that their high hopes had come to nothing, the unquelled spirit of the Jews alone found support in this expectation. Surely their sufferings were for a time only. 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a RIGHTEOUS BRANCH, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.' In such thoughts alone could the souls of these slaves with the hearts of

kings be nourished, only so could they have tolerated the rising and setting of the sun during the seventy years of their exile on the banks of the Euphrates. Obstinately, stubbornly they held to their forlorn hope, until the hope became hard-set in the very hearts of the people, became part of the national consciousness of these extraordinary scavengers of Heaven. 'Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry. . . . Again there shall be heard . . . the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of Hosts; for the Lord is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.'

It must have been a curious scene, this meeting between Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah at Riblah. In an unlucky hour did this son of David look into the cold cat's-eyes of the great Chaldean. Nebuchadnezzar, we are told, before blinding Zedekiah, reproached him for his treachery; for it had been through Nebuchadnezzar's influence that he had been raised to the throne after the carrying away of Jehoiachin. He was to have been the great

king's creature, and lo, he had stirred up rebellion. The misery of the Hebrews was complete, 'even the sea-monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones'; but God, their own God, had utterly rejected them. 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.'

The children of Israel were marshalled together at Ramah, in readiness for their transportation into Babylonia. There they were herded into flocks, like marked market-sheep, to be driven out of their land, out of the land that God sware unto them, out of the Promised Land, and over the Jordan, and across the wide desert to the banks of alien canals and rivers. Slaves again, no longer free, all their audacious claims turned to dust, a proverb, a laughing-stock, a perpetual hissing, a people 'scattered and peeled.' Yet their genius, even now, gave poetic expression to their despair. Rachel, shameless Rachel, in her dark grave hears the foot-treads of her departing children. 'A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentations and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted, because they were not.' To many of the

Hebrews it must have seemed like the final disaster. Jerusalem had been proved to be not inviolable, Solomon's temple had been destroyed, the city of David was in ashes and its walls razed. 'Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat.' How could they lift their eyes to welcome the rising sun, as it came up over those flat stretches of sand? They were no longer even a remnant. They were a ruined people, a people as utterly lost as the citizens of Samaria had been lost, who, a hundred and thirty-six years before, had been carried away to Nineveh by Sargon, king of the Assyrians.

At the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, the second Babylonian empire had been free from the domination of Assyria for twenty years. In the year 606 Nineveh had been completely destroyed by the Scythians, so utterly destroyed that when Xenophon passed across its site two hundred years later, he was ignorant as to the signification of the grass-grown mounds over which his soldiers had trod. During the six centuries of their subjugation, the Babylonians had never forgotten their former glory; and now that they had once more risen to power, they became, under Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nabopolassar, a people satiated

with luxury and magnificence. Once again they raised their temple-towers for their wise astrologers; once again they worshipped their god Marduk, and followed with industry and precision the movements of the planets, as they encircled the sun through the sounding stillness of the Mesopotamian midnight. Nebuchadnezzar, adopting the architectural methods of the Assyrians, rebuilt Babylon. Out of burnt bricks and sun-dried bricks he raised for her enormous walls. He constructed palaces in her that were an astonishment to the ancients, while for the mere whim of his Median wife he built the famous 'hanging gardens,' terrace above terrace, balanced beneath the very clouds.

It was into this environment, an environment besotted with Oriental extravagance, fantastic, wilful, tyrannical, that the dolorous Jews were led. An unhappy, conquered people, with their heads full of melancholy memories, they found clay cone-shaped houses for themselves as best they could in various settlements along the banks of the river Chebar, and of the canal near Nippur. Yet they were neither 'lost' nor assimilated. The voice of Isaiah, the voice of Jeremiah, the teaching of Ezekiel, still sounded in their ears. Each night, as the

signs of the zodiac, marked out so scientifically by their gifted conquerors, moved across the arch of that eastern sky, they remembered Jerusalem; each morning, as they looked westward, she was in their minds. The story of their great past found residence in the brain of every small Hebrew child. The heads of the old men, idling under mastic trees, brooded upon it. And those that were in middle-life, and those that were in the flower of their youth, tenaciously cherished their belief that one day a residue of Jews would return to Jerusalem, to be ruled over by the Messiah, by a king born of the house of David. Surely their present adversities were an unfortunate interruption only in that glorious national progress marked out for them by their God. How could they cherish such hopes, these scantling captives of the lords of the earth? Yet they could not be suppressed, they could not be held back. As kitchen-cats will return to their homes in the face of insuperable obstacles, so would the Jews return to Jerusalem. Their heads sang with the prophecies of their wise men, and the heads of their wise men whirled with dreams and visions. The prophet Ezekiel, that prophet of judgment and grace, was with them. At God's instigation he had eaten the roll of the book wherein

was written, within and without, 'lamentations and mourning and woe.' He had filled his bowels with the roll; and it had been 'in my mouth as honey for sweetness.' Unreasoning, inconsequent demands governed his actions, incredible visions spun out their madness in his brain, his senses became divorced from the sand and dry stones and prickly dwarfed shrubs of the matter-of-fact desert. With laborious elegance the camels came trooping into Babylon, the burdened donkeys passed him between the houses in the lizard-haunted alleys, he saw them not. This importunate illusory earth of our common senses, with 'flies rising from their little graves in walls,' grew ephemeral and insubstantial to him; his reality was made up of stranger sights and sounds, of the noise 'of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them.' The Lord was 'strong' upon him, and though he 'dwelt among scorpions' he became a watchman unto the house of Israel. And behold, a spirit put forth 'the form of a hand,' and, taking him by a lock of his hair, brought him 'in the visions of God to Jerusalem.' At Jerusalem, in the inner temple-court, between the porch and the altar, he saw 'five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the

Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.' Blasphemy beyond blasphemy, to worship the sun, the origin, the quickener of all living existence upon earth, as he came up in unmoved splendour over the Mount of Olives nearly three thousand years ago! 'O sun, why hast thou risen and prevented my contemplating the true light?' How can they perpetrate such an abomination, these five-and-twenty men? Let the recorder of recorders strike their froward hairys calps. Had not Ezekiel on the bank of the mighty river, seen the whirlwind come out of the north, bringing four living creatures with the likeness of a man? 'And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot, and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. . . . Now as I beheld the living creatures, . . . with his four faces, the appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl, . . . and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.' So, and not otherwise, was heralded 'the appearance of the glory of the Lord.'

Not only the nation as a whole, but the individual was now called upon to be responsible for right-

doing. 'When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. . . . Thus saith the Lord God: Because the enemy hath said against you, Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession: Therefore prophesy and say, . . . I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of the countries, and will bring you into your own land. . . . And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers: and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.'

What a song it was for them to sing in their captivity, beginning in madness and ending in sublimity! Out of the dust it was spoken; and it was sufficient to counterpoise the turreted mansions of Babylon, of Babylon whose cedar-wood gates, covered with strips of decorated bronze, had shut-to upon a sharp, shrewd people. The Jews, in truth, were a set of praying-mantises with mandibles sharp as scissors, sheltering on the underside of the mulberry-leaves of the 'pensile paradise,' aloof but alive.

While the prophet Ezekiel was occupying himself among the crumbling shards of that far land, fortifying the little band of despairing exiles

against the long years before them – 'Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God . . . Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come . . . and David my servant will be their prince forever' – other Jews were making their presence felt in the ostentatious chambers of Nebuchadnezzar's palace, kings' sons, children without blemish, of the Hebrew aristocracy. The most exceptional of these gilded eunuchs was none other than the legendary prophet Daniel, who, abstaining from the wine and highly-seasoned royal dainties, was whetting his wits and refining his psychic powers upon a diet of pulse and water, a diet which in its spareness seemed to match that of the prophet Ezekiel, whose barley-cakes were baked by an especial favour of the Almighty with cow's dung, rather than, as was at first suggested, 'with dung that cometh out of man.'

Now it came to pass that Nebuchadnezzar's sleep 'brake from him,' because he dreamed dreams, anxiety-dreams, simple and sinister, that slid from his mind as soon as ever he waked. This power that dreams have of escaping from the head of a dreamer is common to us all. It was particularly

exasperating to Nebuchadnezzar, who laid the greatest store on their interpretation. It struck him that his professional soothsayers, if they had any real insight into the mysteries, should be able to discover what his dreams had been. He therefore called them together and commanded that they should first make known to him his dream, and afterwards show him its meaning. The astrologers and soothsayers were aghast at so new and so searching a test being put upon their art. With vehemence they protested that there was not a man upon the earth that 'can show the king's matter.' But Nebuchadnezzar was short with them, assuring them that if they failed to accomplish what he asked, they should be cut in pieces and their houses converted to dunghills; for, reasoned he, 'ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, and if ye fail now, there is but one decree for you.' His asseveration put the wise men into the greatest perturbation. How could they possibly recapture the visions that passed through the bearded head of the sleeping monarch? But Daniel, 'the master of the magicians,' did it. God reconstructed for him the huge image, with its feet of iron and potter's clay, and he gave to the king its interpretation. The strange powers of the Hebrew

captives were revealed in other ways also. It may have been the recollection of his vision that prompted Nebuchadnezzar to set up in the middle of the plain of Dura a golden idol, before which all his subjects were to bow. It was a notion in keeping with the insolent effrontery of the king, and one that was extremely agitating to his Hebrew captives, notoriously sensitive to any form of blasphemy, especially when presented in the shape of a graven image. 'For they are as crows between heaven and earth. . . . The beasts are better than they: for they can get under a covert, and help themselves. . . . For as a scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers keepeth nothing: so are these gods of wood and laid over with silver and gold.' Three Hebrew youths refused to bend the knee to the monument. A burning fiery furnace had been prepared near by, to correct just such insubordination, and into it they were thrown, 'in their coats, their hosen, and their hats.' But in spite of the fact that the 'king's servants ceased not to make the oven hot with rosin, pitch, tow, and small wood,' a moist whistling wind saved them from hurt, so that Nebuchadnezzar, who was himself superintending the proceedings, presently saw them rise up and walk 'in the midst of the fire';

and there was another with them, and 'the form of the fourth was like the Son of God.' The king was overawed, and called unto these 'servants of the most high God' to come forth; and 'not a hair of their head was singed, neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them.' And because no other gods could deliver after this sort, he made decree that none in future should speak amiss against the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

And after some years Nebuchadnezzar again spoke. 'Unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.' And he showed them how he was at rest in his house, 'and flourishing in his palace,' when a second dream came to trouble him, a dream of a great tree, in which was meat for all, 'and the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof'; and behold, the tree was hewn down, save 'the stump of his roots in the earth.' And Daniel interpreted the meaning of this dream also, and foretold that the king would be mad seven years. And it came to pass, at the end of seven months, that as Nebuchadnezzar walked through the spacious apartments of his palace, his breast swelled

with the consciousness of his own power and achievements.

There, below the galleries of his palace, lay Babylon, encircled by its ditched wall and intersected by the canal Libil-Khigalla. There stood the temple Ekua, decorated with 'red gold,' the hall of oracles Du-azag, and the mighty edifice E-sagila, dedicated to Marduk; and well he knew that each brick used for these stupendous erections had received upon it, in indelible cuneiform markings, the impress of his own illustrious name. And he spoke to himself and said: 'Is not this great Babylon that I have builded for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' His words and vain babbling reflections floated out over the golden lintels and up through the clear atmosphere of the Syrian sky, until they came to the hearing of God. And the attention of the Ancient of days was arrested, and he knew that the Chaldean king was forgetting the limitations, the boundaries that are set about the children of the earth, and in his wrath he sent insanity upon the king, and he was driven from men that same hour, 'and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagle's feathers, and

his nails like bird's claws . . . and his dwelling was with wild asses.'

There was no end to Daniel's achievements. It was he who caused the death of the king's dragon by persuading it to swallow lumps of pitch and fat and hair 'seethed together' – so that the dragon burst asunder. It was he again who foretold the fall of Babylon by construing the three curious words that appeared upon the 'plaister' of the wall over against the candlestick, what time in the great banqueting-chamber Bel-shar-usur, the son of the old antiquarian king Nabonidus, drank wine out of the vessels that had been taken from 'the house of God which was at Jerusalem,' he and his concubines with him. 'And I will send unto Babylon fanners, that shall fan her. . . . Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken with her wine. . . . I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up. . . . Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. . . . Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment.'

In the year 539, Babylon was, indeed, taken by Cyrus, the king of the Persians. If we are to give credence to Scriptural traditions, written down

many years later, Daniel was then carried off into Media. He must have been an old man, but he still had his most important work to do. During this period we see him in two lights, first as the industrious, level-headed President of Satraps, rising up early to do 'the king's business,' and secondly as an old ecstatic ancient, drunk with the gift of prophecy, his head more full of the fumes and vapours of God's great Semitic wine-vat than any that were before him. Out in the open plains, down by those unfamiliar river beds, the grave prime minister would become possessed. The flaming message, so long restrained in his courtly intercourse, would burst from him, till his companions would leave his presence affrighted, leave Daniel the prophet alone in his solitude, either lying prostrate with his face to the ground, or indenting the sand with his hands and knees, as he knelt with curved spine and fallen head before the monstrous visions and revelations that plunged forward into the future, the one after the other.

How these tragic utterances have been studied by human beings at a loss upon their plats of earth, how they have thought to unravel the home-spun threads of fate, as they pored over these

extravagant pages wherein prophecy is wrapped in prophecy! There by the river of Ulai, and by the river which is Hiddekel, came up before him the incredible monsters winged and horned. He saw the rise of Greece, the rise of Rome, and happenings up to the day of doom. And he beheld the Ancient of days, 'whose garment was white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool.' And he saw a horn with a mouth 'that spake very great things,' and another 'little horn which waxed exceeding great and cast down the stars from heaven and stamped upon them.' And he saw 'a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences.' And a voice called to a man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, 'How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? . . . and he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half.'

What wild fancies and imaginations, human, all too human, have not the credulous minds of men read into these exultant river-bed invocations! With their dead before them, generation after generation of men and women have called out in their great darkness for guidance, for reassurance.

They would have a solid-bottomed, well-fenced universe about them, with entrance and exit such as all can understand. These messages have been preserved, even in the art of letters, in veritable jots and tittles, messages that have been examined and re-examined by the animal-heads of men, peered at by eyes bright with youth, and by spectacled eyes dim with age, searched into by hearts hungry for salvation, these words of a man beside himself with miraculous intimations, on the banks of Asiatic streams. 'None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.'

'I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.'

One of the most characteristic of the songs of Israel is the well-known One hundred and thirty-seventh Psalm. Here is revealed a depth and tenderness of feeling wholly romantic, side by side with a savagery of thought, and a savagery of

speech, that would, if use and wont had not dulled our understanding, shock us with the shock of the most barbarous battle-chant ever chanted by Masai or Red Indian.

Often in wonder have I watched sensitive, sweet-natured mothers, whose breasts are still nursing their babies, sing these terrible words in complete unconcern, words composed long ago by dangerous emancipated bond-slaves, and commemorated in our churches and cathedrals by the accident of our faith:

'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

'We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

'For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song: and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

'If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

'Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.

'O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

'Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.'

Forty-nine years after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews won permission from Cyrus to return to Palestine. Some fifty thousand of them took advantage of this decree. It was a chance beyond what might have been expected. The sacred vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the temple were given back to them; and with their hands strengthened with presents from the Babylonians, and with their hearts strengthened with anticipations of the sure 'mercies of their god,' they set their faces toward the hills they loved. Beforetimes they fled out of Egypt, and now it was out of Babylonia they departed, and still they were the same, the same, the same, a difficult, stubborn, obstinate people, 'a wicked nation . . . a nation separate from others, unsociable, neither admitting the same sort

of divine worship that others do.' There they went trailing off toward the river Jordan, with their four hundred and thirty-five camels, their two hundred and forty-five mules, their six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses. Yet, I suppose, as the camels received their burdens on the first day of that setting-out, they twisted round their tasselled necks and groaned as they do to-day, neither camel nor henny nor ass having knowledge of the hap that had selected them out of the generations of beasts to take a part in this most memorable migration. For the history of these travellers, 'whose spirit God had raised to go to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem,' was still big with consequence for the human race. And yet who could have foreseen it, what wise magian watching from the top of his tower that retreating band, disappearing toward the sinking sun, could have suspected the issue of it all, could have had knowledge, as he observed the long lines of burdened camels, tied head to tail, diminishing to the size of a troop of fluffed-out turkeys on the bare border of the horizon, that these cattle were conveying the furniture of a people destined to bewilder—yes, and to deceive—the hearts of unnumbered generations?

They reached the sacred hill at last, those sons of the exile, that hill crowned with ruins of the broken city, the gateposts of it still showing the charred traces of the 'consuming fire' of the disastrous destruction of fifty years before. And there, in its place, stood the great sacrificial rock, 'where before Abraham the angels went on pilgrimage,' raising its mute, massive, sullen presence in the midst of the fallen débris of Solomon's great temple. There, upon its gross flank, were the channels that we see to-day, grooved out to carry away the red streams of sacrificial blood through two narrow nostril-like holes. How curious it is to a reflective mind to contemplate these various rough projections upon the earth's surface, which have been selected as supreme centres of human civilization! How strange to touch with one's own hand the bed-rock of Jerusalem, the bed-rock of the Acropolis, the bed-rock of Rome, of Westminster on the Thames, to meditate upon these natural features of our planet, on whose obedient, uncommunicative outcroppings so much passionate emotion has been expended. There they once lay bare to the stars and to the sun, each protruding parcel of sacred ground set apart from the rest of the earth's crusted surface, to support upon their

benumbed backs temple, church, and cathedral tower!

And Jeshua, the son of Jazadak, and Zerubbabel, the son of Pedaiah, gathered the remnant of Israel together and builded the altar of the god of Israel and offered once more in the mornings and evenings burnt-offerings unto the Lord. And after the manner indicated to Ezekiel by the man 'whose appearance was as of bronze,' they laid the foundations of the new temple. The priests in their white raiment blew blasts upon their rams'-horns and silver trumpets, and all the people 'sang together by course in praising, and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel.' Yet some of the more ancient men, who were old enough to remember the first temple, 'exceeding magnifical of fame and glory over all the earth,' who could recollect it as it had been in those distracted last days, when Jeremiah had walked in its courts, and when the countryside had been so 'chapt' by the unprecedented drought that had preceded the final overthrow, that the hart had calved in the field 'and forsook it because there was no grass,' and the wild asses had stood upon the high places, snuffing up the wind 'like dragons,' these ancient men came

to the building of this one 'with weeping and great crying,' so it came to pass that those who stood afar off could not 'discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people.'

It was not until the year 516 that Zerubbabel's temple was completed by this remnant who were but as 'the chaff to the wheat' to the Hebrews of the old time, 'foundlings, proselytes, and bastards,' who knew no other tongue to speak but Chaldean-Aramaic. Owing to the jealousy of the natives who dwelt about Jerusalem, the work was delayed. The local potentates of Palestine could not bear to see the house of 'the great God' builded once more 'with great stones'; and they wrote letters to Darius, protesting vigorously against the restoration of the 'rebellious and bad city.' Indeed, it owed its final construction to the urgent, unaffrighted crying of two prophets, the prophet Haggai and the prophet Zechariah. 'Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts.'

A strange pair were these two – the former including 'stones and timber amongst the essentials

of his spiritual ideal,' and the latter immemorial imaginings born to him out of the past, out of the future, by flying scrolls, by evil-removing flying storks! His very being shivered and trembled with prophecy. Clearly he saw that the day would come when men 'out of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you. . . . Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.'

Years passed; and in the year 445 a new leader of the people came out of Babylon, Nehemiah, the privileged butler of the Persian king, Artaxerxes I. All the while that he had been occupied with his daily task in the royal pantries, this dutiful servant had been meditating upon the great traditions of his race. It was his custom to inquire of any returned Jew of the welfare of Jerusalem; and presently, when he was told of the great affliction of the ancient city, and that its walls still remained broken down, the conviction came to him that it was he, and no other, that had been called by God to build them up again. With the permission of his

master, therefore, he set out for Palestine. After he had been in Jerusalem three days, he rode out one night to inspect the condition of the fallen walls, without letting anyone know what he had in his mind to do. 'Neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.' He went down the valley of Jehoshaphat as far as the Dovecot rock, and from there to the Joppa gate; 'and the rulers knew not whither I went, nor what I did.' His midnight excursion showed him that what he proposed to do was possible. And he now boldly called to the Jews: 'Come, and let us build the walls of Jerusalem.' The surrounding inhabitants had resented the building of Zerubbabel's temple; but now, when they saw that the Jews were once more raising the walls of Jerusalem, their alarm and indignation knew no bounds. Sanballat, the Samaritan, openly mocked at them: 'What do these feeble Jews, will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice?' Tobiah, the Ammonite, derided their efforts, saying, 'If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall'; but the energetic and industrious serving-man, like another Abacuck Pricket, was not to be discouraged by such taunts, and day after day the walls of Jerusalem grew up about the city. 'For the people had

a mind to work.' With their bows and habergeons within reach of them, they laboured on from 'the morning till the stars appeared.' At last their labour was finished, and once more the walls of Jerusalem stood about her; and Nehemiah was able to give instructions that her gates were not to be opened 'until the sun be hot.' Although we cannot but commend Nehemiah's zeal, yet the actual personality of the man is not appealing. His utterances smack too much of the silky lip-service of a menial on the lookout for heel-taps and choice pastry morsels. He addresses Jehovah as he doubtless used to address Artaxerxes, tilting the embossed decanter with lowered voice and discreetly servile intonation. The walls are completed, and it is 'Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.' He drags forth the 'household stuff' of Tobiah, the Ammonite, which Eliashib, the high-priest, had generously allowed that scoffer to store for a time in one of the chambers of the temple, and it is 'Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God.' His activities were eventually interrupted by a return to his former service.

Of entirely different temper was Ezra, 'a ready scribe in the law,' who came up out of Babylon with a second band of immigrants, about the year 398. Artaxerxes II had appointed him to be a judge over the remnant of the people. And when, under the hand of God, this good and intolerant old Jew, this practical founder of priestly later-day Judaism, arrived at Jerusalem, he found that the princes and the rulers, and many other of the Hebrews, had again mingled the 'holy seed,' and taken for their wives outlandish women; and he plucked out the hair from head and beard and sat down 'astonied.' God had given to his people 'a little reviving' for a little space, 'grace had been shown from the Lord,' and yet here they were once more committing the ancient trespass. 'Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? Wouldst not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant or escaping?' Under Ezra's wise and benevolent influence, a great revival was inaugurated, and the people were purified. It was perhaps he who founded the post-exilic ecclesiasticism. He read to the people from the Book of the Law, standing upon a pulpit of wood in the street

that was 'before the water-gate,' and he read from early morning until midday, before the men and the women and those that could understand. 'And the ears of all the people were attentive unto the Book of the Law. . . . And Ezra blessed the Lord, the Great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.'

For some two hundred years the returned Jews passed their days in comparative peace. It was a time of great literary activity. Efforts were made to codify and bring into order the oral tradition of their race, and the fragments of ancient inspired writing already in existence. Wise and sagacious men of a priestly cast of mind prepared and arranged the sacred canon. It might almost be said that the Old Testament was at this period for the first time written down. But not only were the legends collected and put into a lasting form, together with the works of the prophets and other fragmentary scriptures, but also certain writings of great originality were composed.

Meanwhile, the political position of the Jews was that of a small tributary state of the Persian empire. They were, however, permitted to perform

their peculiar religious rites in their temple, with the successive descendants of Eliashib officiating as high priest.

These priestly preoccupations were interrupted in the year 331 by the appearance of Alexander the Great at the gates of Jerusalem. The prophecy of the prophet Daniel was at last fulfilled. 'And as I was considering, behold, an he-goat came from the west in the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground, and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes.' It was an event of large significance for the future of the Jews. For the first time the representative of the Jewish high place came in direct contact with the people 'of the isles,' who at that time were the exponents of the world's highest civilization. The meeting of the two peoples offered a strange juxtaposition; and if we are to believe Josephus, it took place under circumstances singularly dramatic. The heroical, romantic-minded Macedonian had already twice defeated the Persians, and was making his way down the Mediterranean shore, when his triumphant project was checked by the obstinate resistance of Tyre, the maritime rival of his people. Alexander did not underestimate the strength of the island city, and

sent messages to the high priest at Jerusalem, asking for help in his undertaking. The Jews, remembering that they owed their return to the indulgence of the lords of Persia, refused either to send auxiliaries or to supply the Greek troops with food. 'They had given their oath to Darius not to bear arms against him; and they said that they would not transgress this as long as Darius was in the land of the living.' Alexander the Great took this answer very ill; and while busy with the construction of his celebrated mole, he assured himself that when his task was accomplished, he would teach Jaddua, the high priest, 'to whom he must keep his oath.' And in due time, Tyre having been reduced to a place 'to spread nets upon,' he prepared to pay off his grudge. The advance of the Greek army upon Jerusalem filled Jaddua with consternation. He was put to his utmost shifts, and, like Hezekiah before the threatened invasion of Sennacherib, offered prayers and appeals to God, and the God of Abraham gave an attentive ear to his supplications. He was told in a dream to adorn the city as for a gala-day, to clothe all the inhabitants in white, to don his own priestly vestments, and at the head of a procession of citizens to march out toward the Greek army, offering

Alexander the freedom of the city. He fulfilled these instructions, and the 'venerable' procession met Alexander as that conqueror came over Mount Scopus in full view of the Holy City.

The priest was dressed in purple and scarlet. His mitre was on his head, and he bore upon his forehead the letters of the incommunicable name. Now, the camp-followers of the Greek army had 'thought they should have liberty to plunder the city and torment the high priest to death, which the king's displeasure fairly promised them'; but lo, the very reverse happened, and to their amazement they saw Alexander prostrate himself before the pontiff of the morose people they so spitefully hated. They thought his mind must be deranged, and Parmenio, his faithful general, boldly asked him, 'How it came about that when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews.' Alexander explained the mystery forthwith. It turned out that when he was at Dios in Macedonia, he had seen Jaddua in a vision, and the high priest had then promised him victory over the Persians.

His ill-humour being extinguished in this way, he allowed Jaddua to take him by the hand and lead him into Jerusalem, while the lesser priests

'ran along by his side.' Alexander went up to the temple and offered sacrifices to Jehovah, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the rest of the Jews; and the elders unrolled the Book of Daniel and showed Alexander how in its script he was likened to an he-goat, and Alexander, it is suggested, read this singular passage with no little complacence. 'And I saw him come closer unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns; and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand. Therefore the he-goat waxed very great.' It was a notable meeting between Greek and Jew before the rugged sacrificial rock, the spiritual threshing-floor of all the nations of the earth.

Mention must now be made of one of the greatest books contained in the Bible, the Book of Ecclesiastes. It was written in the period immediately following the conquest of Alexander. Many a gloss of later editors mars its text, but the sombre substructure of this astonishing work stands firm below the impertinent handicraft of pious manipulators. From the first page to the last, the breath of

truth is to be found in its chapters. Its passages of melodious prose liberate the mind and the spirit. 'Life is short but truth works far and lives long.' At last a Hebrew has risen who can review the spectacle of existence with unblurred sight. Here there is no fooling; no prejudiced preconceptions obscure our sight. The voice of a noble mind speaks out plain and clear. That this book has held its place in the Christian and Jewish Bible, offers indisputable testimony to the wisdom of the men of the old times.

The preacher speaks under the shadow of the name of King Solomon, and he utters his wisdom without misgiving or hesitation. Renan said that Ecclesiastes was the only 'charming' book written by a Jew. The word 'charming' was ill-chosen. It is more than that. Out of its grave periods there rises an attitude that belongs to the earth upon which we stand, and into whose belly we go. It is the song of the soil, the deep utterance of our mother. The furrowed tilth has groaned and has delivered her message. Before the strength of this rhythmical outburst, all the intertwined fabric of the metaphysical edifice trembles. Here, at any rate, is no false light, no false hope, no perfidious

'pure concept.' Here is wisdom deep-seated and shrewd, wisdom charged with poetry unmeasured as life itself. *It is the truth.* Say what we will, this 'canticle of scepticism' has in it the heart of the matter. 'If any man teacheth a different doctrine, he is puffed up, knowing nothing.'

'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.' The sun rises and sets, the rivers flow into the sea, the wind 'returneth again according to his circuit,' the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing, and no language created can utter it. It is common knowledge, that can be understood by children. Let us not be deceived by 'vain opinions.' We have been called up out of the dust. There can be no doubt of it, 'we are born at all adventure.' In a day, in an hour, our bones, hollow as flutes, will once again be still in the pit. There is no hope beyond the grave. 'All go unto one place: all are of the dust, and return to dust again. . . . For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth the beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast; for all is vanity.'

To-day I visited an enormous cavern hidden

from sight under an abrupt precipice on this island of Capri. Bones of primitive men have been found here, lying by rude stone implements. How awful was this place! It was God-haunted, eternity-haunted; and as I stood there in silence, a solitary living mind, it was possible actually to register an isolated second in a vast epoch of infinity. The roof of the rude abode dropped water from rounded stones pendent like the mammalia of some monstrous beast. In the dim light it fell from the maidenhair fern on to the dusty floor below. What was happening had happened for unrecorded ages. These stone paps were relatively deathless, and yet they themselves were but of yesterday. Mind and spirit, substances, essences so vague and vacillating – what hope, what chance, have they against an evidence so thick? Priests, philosophers, how can their spiral conclusions survive, deriving as they do from such a bed? Fugitive articulations! I saw the generations stretching out from the past into the future, and knew that there could be no human destiny outside the matrix of matter. We have been deceived. All our books, all our learning, all our involved methods of intricate thought, terminate like forked lightning in the ground. And when once this has been accepted with an unflinching

acceptance, it is possible for something deep down in our being to respond with imaginative confidence to our lot. The contemplation of annihilation on so prodigious a scale is not incompatible with resignation. A feeling of awe is aroused in us, as when we confront and meditate upon any great movement of Nature. It is like looking at the sea, at the night-sky, or like being present at a birth. All thoughts, all convictions, Christianity itself, will vanish away. 'We are led about from ideas, to ideas, through ideas,' but the conclusion is oblivion. The drift of the vast flood, without beginning or end, moves backwards and forwards. Life is thrown up, life is withdrawn, life flourishes, life fades. It is useless to question. A handful of gravel is all the answer we will get to our ultimate queries. Spindrift we are, spindrift driven by the wind – rising and falling, rising and falling. When once this simple and natural knowledge has been learnt, we are in a position to indulge in a new reviewing. Under compulsion from this august fact we can re-order our lives and re-number our days. All is not lost. We have our moment. If only for an hour, let us fly free. Nature will assuage the bitterness of our end as no priest can. 'Free amongst the dead.' And until our hour strikes, why should all be lost

for those who worship the sun? 'For to him which is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. . . . Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.'

It should be a wise man's confident purpose to experience his measure of consciousness to the full. 'Let no flower of the spring pass by us.' Than this there is no greater wisdom. Any assurance arrived at otherwise than through the senses is illusory. 'The rabble of the senses,' rough and ready though they be, remain the ultimate and only test. 'There is nothing in the intellect except what was first in the senses.' Whoredom perpetrations with mystical mistresses bring only unease and unrest to the populations. 'For like as the ground is given unto the wood, and the sea to his flood, even so they that dwell upon the earth may understand nothing but that which is upon the earth.' We have our day. Is bread nothing? Is wine nothing? Why cannot we be satisfied with the fair flesh of women, the wonder of their incomparable bodies, the beauty of their looks, the sweet clemency of their love? The soul of life lies embedded in what is transitory. The very nature of beauty is ephemeral. To deny this is to deny the high destiny that is the ancient

heritage of mortals. In a few flashing moments that are his, it is possible for a man to glimpse immortality, the only immortality he will ever know, in the presentation of what is, in its essence, perishing. Life is a spectacle deep and sorrowful and very tender. In the hour of death we receive instruction. When the head of the one we love lies low, with our despair comes revelation. Then are we cradled in the arms of life. Her ways are swift ways, her breath at the end is the breath of a great assuagement. From dust we rose, from dust we were swept into phantom figures. We have known love, we have known vanishing beauty, its anguish, its haunting ecstasy. Cannot that suffice? Why must we forever strive in an unequal contest against laws inherent in nature? Our carnival-day is now, very now. Our pellets of corn are on our platters. Must we never be tired of raising our necks to call more, more, like farmyard geese? Life is but a shifting floor. Tragedy, yes, and dark misery come forward and recede, intermingling their steps with light dances of joy and gladness. Though death cancels, though time obliterates, we have had experience of the eternal delirium. We have been permitted for a brief duration to drink of a spiced cup. We have seen the sun. We have seen the

moon. We have come out from a great darkness and looked upon a great light. How can we forswear our inestimable privilege? 'The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.' The earth, with its infinite secrets, its infinite delights and shadows, is enough. Though for years we suffer torments, though we are made to howl like kennelled dogs, yet if there has been a period when we have been happy, abroad in fields of buttercup and red sorrel, our birth has been justified. What could we give in exchange for still shadows passing over our souls, for dangerous, illuminating thoughts? What in exchange for the sight of a brother 'in his dark cloud' stirring up strong emotions? These things are not to be misprized. They are sufficient. They touch eternity in time. What though we go down to the grave? There is nothing here for lamentation. 'Fear not the sentence of death, remember them that have been before thee, and that come after; for this is the sentence of the Lord over all flesh.' A miracle has happened. It has passed. We are content to rest, the lover and the beloved, in eternal silence.

The world is waxen old. No man has seen God at any time. Where are these shadowy influences, dwelling, as the great master taught, aloof in calm

interspaces between the stars? Who can tell whether our cries, our prayers, ever reach to them? Who can trace their directing hand upon the earth? The problem of Job, the problem of the Preacher, remain our problem to-day. 'I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill: but time and chance happeneth to them all!'

We have our reward; the revelation of seeing a morsel of criss-cross frost on a country-road outbalances the scales. The mere fact that in that hour we can look, and can comprehend, has already forestalled the long, unrecorded periods when our skull will moulder and break asunder. Our redemption rests in the very curtailment of our own experience, so delicate, so sensitive is it, so incomprehensible, struck, as it were, out of radium. 'As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the work of God who maketh all.' Why do we resist our set terms? Life is deeper than we could have imagined, more unscrupulous, more vigorous, more exultant. It contains the cry of love, the cry of lust, and the cry

of birth. 'O Lord, thou hast brought my soul from the grave; thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.' Yet all things tend to their end. 'And if our fate be death, give light and let us die.' Let our lives be built on firm foundations, on the sound soil of the unasking land. Have done with neurotic hankerings. This is no riddle devised by Solomon. It is a tale easy to be understood. We die, we are swallowed up, forgotten, lost as any potsherd – dead men 'out of mind.'

The book ends as it began, in poetry. It is thus that life should always be considered and judged, thus and not otherwise. The writer contemplates the state of old age as it draws slowly towards its culmination. The man who once ran light of foot through the terraced vineyards, drags himself forward now with the halting progression of an injured grasshopper. His hair is white as the almond tree, his arms tremble, his teeth are few, and their grinding is low. In all literature it would be difficult to match the noble melody of these last verses. Here is no fever, here is no complaint, every word is resonant. It is as though the lot of each man and each woman born from the womb, had found in this dirge its adequate celebration. 'In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and

the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was.'

The Jews very nearly succumbed to the influence of the Greeks. This brilliant people, with their æsthetic and intellectual gifts, roused a response in their hearts such as the brutish Assyrians and necromancing Babylonians had never been able to make them experience. The Jews were quick to recognize the spiritual intensity of their new masters, and for a brief period the confidence they felt in their national destiny was seriously shaken. Hellenistic manners, Hellenistic

practices, Hellenistic methods of thought, penetrated even to the temple gates. The protagonists of the natural and the protagonists of the supernatural had met at last, and there ensued a remarkable contest, the outcome of which it was difficult at first to foresee. How could these surly monotheists survive, now that they were in direct contact with the brilliant genius for life everywhere exhibited by their conquerors? Never before had the things of this world been presented in so appealing a form. In the bright light of the Greek day the fires upon the national altar burnt low. When all the world flourished in so clear an illumination to what purpose would the Jews carry further the 'wilder fringes of the fire'? At no period in their history was the obsession of their father Abraham so gravely endangered. Many of the Jews welcomed the new culture with enthusiasm. They adopted the dress of the Greeks, took to themselves Greek names, and studied how to conduct themselves with decorum after Western fashions.

And once more Palestine became a cockpit within the boundaries of which the successors of Alexander struggled for mastery. Now it was one of the Ptolemies, coming up from Egypt, who overran the country, and now the Seleucid power,

marching southward from Antioch. And to each successful victor tribute had to be paid. The position of high priest became a political office for the possession of which there arose the fiercest contentions. Favouritism and bribery prevailed, until it came to pass that a descendant of Eli, naming himself Jason, built a gymnasium in the Holy City, where he and the temple priests, hurrying from their sacrifices in Greek caps, disported themselves in athletic feats, casting the discus and suchlike sports, the while 'hiding the circumcision of their genitals,' that even when they were naked they might appear to be Greeks. And yet beneath such disturbing manifestations there remained still a sullen national party adhering to the ancient traditions. This party held piously to the time-honoured convictions of their race. It was not for them to hide the physical defects that marked their eternal covenant with God. If all Asia fell away under the insidious influence of these graceful and versatile foreigners, they would remain faithful to the truth, the simple, ignorant truth as it had been revealed to their fathers, and to the men of the old time before them. The sceptical Greeks, with their 'bewitching of naughtiness,' had no conception of the zealotry that deep religious feeling can arouse in

unsophisticated souls. They were exasperated that the single small province of a 'malicious people' should dare to offer even the semblance of resistance to the customs that they were imposing over the length and breadth of the East. And when at last Palestine passed from the control of Egypt to that of Syria, Antiochus IV was roused to make a systematic effort to compel this perverse people to accept the conventions, language, and religion of the Greeks without reservations. Antiochus Epiphanes, or Epimanes the Maniac, as the Jews nicknamed him – 'a wicked root' – came up against Jerusalem in no good humour. His depredations in Egypt had been roughly checked by the Romans; and it was when still suffering from the hurt to his vanity done by Caius Popilius Laenas with his circle in the sand, that he first entered the city. On this occasion he contented himself with pillaging the temple, but when he returned two years later it was to begin with all seriousness his campaign for the conversion of the Jews. The conversion of the Jews! Here, indeed, had he known it, was a task difficult to compass. Easier had it been for him to cause the waters of the Cydnus to flow backwards! The conversion of the Jews! The very phrase has become a byword. Did he not know,

had he not heard, how these 'yahudis' would 'withdraw the shoulder and harden the neck' from the yoke of their own very God? They have the thick inconsistent withers of so many zebras; and who has been able to harness them up, and to drive them with delicate whips down the road of time? These are people whose ears lie flat, who hunch themselves, and who dig their heels deep, and are not to be budged. The conversion of the Jews! Good luck to him who undertakes so merry a task!

Yet it must be acknowledged that Antiochus Epimanes made a memorable essay. He entered the temple and removed the golden candlesticks, the table of shew-bread, the golden altar, and the rest of the holy furniture, even unto the veils of the temple that were of 'fine linen and scarlet.' He then slew every Jew who resisted him, especially each scribe 'who made a hedge about the law.' He forbade the priests to offer up their daily sacrifices, he sent into captivity as many as ten thousand men, women, and children. He whipped them with rods and tore them to pieces. He raised idols in every town and village. He forbade them to practise the rite of circumcision, and in the case of disobedience crucified the Jewish mothers, hanging their circumcised babies about their necks. He dili-

gently searched out all the copies of the Book of the Law, and those in whose possession it was found miserably perished.

Finally, with exquisite malice, he built an idol-altar upon the sacred sacrificial rock, and, with full knowledge of the passionate prejudice of the people with whom he was dealing, deliberately offered up a sow upon that holy place. Horror upon horror, no longer was there heard in the temple-court the lowing of oxen or the bleating of sheep, but instead there sounded the hideous grunts of the one animal most accursed and despised! Throughout the generations, evilly-disposed men have made use of the Jews' neurotic dislike for this debased mammal to torture their feelings and to torment their minds. Never was it done with more deliberate devilry. The temple of Zerubbabel rang with the uncouth and obscene squeaks of this animal, as, in derisive contempt for the appalled sensibilities of the listeners, she was dragged by her flapping slippery ears to the ancient stone. The pavements of the Lord's house were soiled with her excrement, and in the place of holy incense that stench, so unmistakable, so sour-sweet, rose as from a sty. What if these outcries had penetrated to the king's sepulchre, to the place where King David slept side by side with his

illustrious son? What if the sacrilegious clamour of this suffering sow had reached the ears of Elijah, as he walked by the right hand of God. 'Blessed be He,' ready to blow the trumpet of the Messiah? 'My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!' It was the supreme desecration, the ultimate degradation of all that the Hebrew nation held most dear. Antiochus could not have devised a blasphemy more calculated to outrage the souls of his recalcitrant subjects. It was done on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev (168 B.C.), and the day was never forgotten. In a single hour their vacillations were at an end. No longer was it possible for them to halt between two opinions. This spectacular affront done to their national worship jerked them wide awake. Their very existence as a separate people was threatened, their special claims as a dedicated people, and they knew it. 'To your tents, O Israel!'

The rebellion started at a little place named Modin, a village not far from Lydda. 'Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man.' Here it was that the aged Mattathias, the father of five sons, of the family of the Hasmonæans, 'of the stock of the appointed

priest,' and also a leader of the nationalist party, refused to obey the orders of Antiochus, that 'Prince of Pollution.' A pig was laid upon the altar; and, as the chief representative of the people, Mattathias was called upon to offer it up. Filled with divine fury, the old man slew Apelles, the king's general; and calling upon all who were 'zealous for the laws of his country and the worship of God' to follow him, he betook himself to the wilderness. Like an African bush-fire in a dry season, the rebellion spread over the land. Each one of his five sons, to whom he entrusted 'the cause of the pious,' died for his country's liberation. In vain did the Greco-Macedonian rulers try to recover their hold upon the land. Enormous armies were sent against Judas Maccabeus. His methods of guerilla warfare were everywhere successful, and under the direction of these valiant patriots the children of Israel proved themselves to be a match for their enemies. 'Judas was renowned unto the utmost part of the earth, and he gathered together such as were ready to perish.' Two important generals, Nicanor and Gorgias, came down from Antioch. They were defeated, and the slave-traders who had come with them in the hope of making profit out of the captured Jews

were themselves sold into bondage. 'Gold and silver, and blue silk, and purple of the sea, and great riches' fell into the hands of the Maccabees, while after a later battle the very body of Nicanor, together with his great toes, was hung over the Gate of Nicanor in the temple of Jerusalem. It was a savage retribution for the man who had so hated the city, who had each day 'wagged his hand against its walls,' crying, 'O when shall I be able to lay thee waste!' If reverses came to the Maccabees it was never for long. The Jews fought with that insane fury which has so often startled the world. No heroism was too great for them to perform. When Eleazar, the brother of Judas, thought he recognized the king riding in a tower on the back of an elephant, he stabbed the beast in its swelling abdomen, willingly suffering death by its fall.

The purpose of Antiochus had been to remove the superstitions of the Jews, to give them Greek customs, 'and thus to improve the characteristics of this most detestable race.' In a short time he had had his bellyful of them, and died in Taba, a Persian city, of a pining distemper, brought on, so it was rumoured, by a melancholy brooding upon

the profanities he had practised in Jerusalem. He had thought to turn Jerusalem into 'the Jews' burial-place,' but he was not destined to succeed in that age-old Gentile ambition. He had compelled her citizens to march in procession like Bacchanals with ivy-wreaths upon their fanatical foreheads, but he lived to see them in far other guise. Judas returned in triumph to Jerusalem, singing psalms and songs, with harps and cymbals. He found the temple-courts forlorn and deserted. Their gates had been burnt down and weeds were growing up between the flagstones. Judas removed the stones of the polluted altar to one of the porches, 'until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them.' He then purged the site, purified it, and inaugurated once more, with new vessels and a new altar, the ancient national ceremonies. The last of the brothers was Simon, 'the father,' as old Mattathias had called him. He was both prince and high priest to his people; and during his sovereignty of eight years, the independence of the Jews was formally recognized. He it was who first minted coins, 'shekels of Israel,' and entered into a league with the Romans. In his days, 'the ancient men sat all in the streets of Jerusalem, conversing together of the wealth of

the land, and the young men put on glorious and warlike apparel,' a characteristic sequel to their regeneration.

In memory of the Maccabees, of the father and mother and five sons, the Jews built seven tall pillars on a hillside near Modin. These monuments survived the destruction of Jerusalem, and, indeed, remained a landmark for ships till late in the fourth century after the birth of Christ. Simon, 'the Benefactor,' who had been made high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet,' was treacherously killed, when drunk, by his son-in-law, Ptolemy, 'in a little hold, called Docus.' To avenge his death, John Hyrcanus, Simon's youngest son, besieged the Egyptian in his fortress near Jericho. Ptolemy, however, had with him as prisoner Hyrcanus' mother, whom he had ensnared; and now, whenever the young Asmonæan leader applied himself with vigour to the siege, Ptolemy had up his mother on the walls, and set about beating her with rods. With true heroism the patriotic woman called to her son not to be moved from his purpose by the sight of her suffering. 'Now,' writes Josephus, 'Hyrcanus' case was this: when he considered the courage of his mother and heard her entreaties, he set about his attacks; but when he

saw her beaten, and torn to pieces with the stripes, he grew feeble.' These delays enabled Ptolemy eventually to make good his escape. The young Hyrcanus governed the Jews for thirty years with the greatest prudence. It is true that in an extremity he was bold enough to take from King David's sepulchre three thousand talents of silver, and that he, 'a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek,' quarrelled with the Pharisees, thereby beginning a feud between this 'separated' sect and the Asmonæan dynasty, which on more than one occasion was to jeopardize the state. Josephus says of him that he was esteemed by God to be worthy of the three greatest privileges: the government of the nation, the dignity of the high priesthood, and prophecy, 'for God was with him and enabled him to know futurities.'

He was succeeded by his son, Aristobulus, who reigned one year, and who was the first of his line formally to assume the dignity of kingship. The reign of this philhellene, this man of 'candour,' was followed by that of his brother, the notorious Jannæus Alexander. This ruler was hated by 'the painted pharisees,' and eventually, because they pelted him with citrons, he crucified as many as eight hundred of these pietists, as he lay feasting

with his concubines in full view of the city. Thus does power corrupt even the stock of heroes.

His reign was a reign of vicissitudes and bloodshed. When he asked the Pharisees to suggest terms of peace – 'Thy death' was the sullen answer he got from them. His rule lasted twenty-seven years, until 'he fell into a distemper by hard drinking,' and died during one of his campaigns on the other side of the Jordan. The quarrels that ensued between his two sons, Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II, great-grandsons of Mattathias, prepared the way for the ascendancy of the family of the Herods. The disputes between the two brothers brought the great Roman, Pompey, fresh from battling with Mithridates, upon the scene. Aristobulus was 'an active bold man.' Hyrcanus, on the contrary, who was to become the cat's-paw of Antipater, delighted rather in 'a quiet life.' The latter, as a power in the hands of Antipater, lived to have his ears bitten off by the teeth of his own nephew, a vicious mutilation done to prevent him from ever again performing the office of high priest, whose physical body had to be without blemish. It was to punish his arrogant brother that Pompey the Great approached Jerusalem, coming up from

Jericho. Hyrcanus gave Pompey what help he could; and, after a desperate struggle, the Romans entered the Holy City.

The Jews had already formed their opinion of this new people. They had allied themselves to them, had become their 'friends and confederates,' because they perceived them to be 'mighty and valiant men,' and recognized the terrible force of their outstretched arms; but at the same time, deep in their hearts, they despised and hated them. The Romans, on their part, never understood the Jews. They were bewildered by them, at one moment feeling nothing but contempt and disgust for their irrational conduct, and at the next experiencing an uneasy sense of awe before the tenacity with which they held to their punctilious prejudices. It was the apposition of worldly efficiency and inspired bigotry, the meeting of a dog with a fire-spit cat. 'Good success be to the Romans, and to the people of the Jews by sea and by land for ever.' The Romans boasted of their proud origin. The Jews had their own private explanation of it. As the angel Gabriel was returning to God, after having reproved King Solomon for marrying Pharaoh's daughter, he stuck a reed into the sea, and this reed had stirred up some befouled mud, which took the

form of an island and ultimately grew into the city of Rome.

Pompey's siege of Jerusalem had lasted three months. When the Roman soldiers at last broke into the temple, probably on the Day of Atonement, in the year 63, they were astonished to observe that the priests calmly continued their religious practices, even in the very eye of death. The Romans put them to the sword; but those who remained alive continued to burn incense and to offer drink-offerings, as though ignorant of the presence of their bloodthirsty assailants. In this way were the Romans initiated into the temper of this exceptional race, whose dark, ardent eyes were fixed upon matters beyond their ken and outside their understanding. Twelve thousand Jews lost their lives.

When the massacre was at last over, Pompey was curious to have a look at the sanctuary about which so much passionate religious devotion had been centred. It was rumoured that the place contained the image of an ass. Alone he went into the Holy of Holies, an entrance forbidden to all but the high priest on the Day of Atonement. He found that the chamber was dark. For a moment

the proud European, who was to lose his life so miserably upon the ribbed sands of the Egyptian seashore, took critical observation of the heart of the universe, and lo, it was nothing but a silent vacuum, an unoccupied pocket of stillness, preserved for the adoration of nothingness, for the worship of the ultimate void!

After the last Asmonæan prince, 'Antigona,' had been beheaded like a common criminal by the axe of a lictor, the objective history of the Jews concentrated about the figure of Herod the Great. Below the drama of the life of this redoubtable heathen sovereign there still flowed, however, the deep surging current of the nation's subjective existence. It is always there as a background to Herod's grandeur, and not even the king himself could direct this flood out of its natural channels, out of those channels so narrow and so deep. Little did it profit Herod to cajole the Jerusalem multitude, to gather the people together and to call himself the king of the Jews; he was an alien, a circumcised Edomite, a slave's son, and from the first to the last the security of his throne depended for its support upon the Romans.

But when this has been said, we cannot but admire the indomitable courage, the political acumen,

and the capacity of this man who for thirty years administered the affairs of the turbulent province. He towered over the Jews, a formidable foreign potentate, able to frown a whole nation out of countenance. The Jews stood before him astonished; then they remembered their watchword, 'Wait on Jehovah and keep his way.' Herod, proud and superstitious as he was, half hoped, perhaps, to be acclaimed as the Messiah whose coming had been foretold by so many of the prophets. It was possibly with this notion in his mind that he rebuilt the temple of Zerubbabel, which was by this time five hundred years old. The royal adventurer was in every way eager to court the favour of his subjects. The Jews remained overawed and sullenly hostile. They were intimidated, but unsubdued. To establish himself in their opinion, he married Mariamne, the last surviving Asmonæan princess. The Jews interested themselves in her children, but continued to hate Herod. And the hand of the king lay heavy upon them.

Herod cared, it seemed, less for the welfare of his overtaxed subjects than for the construction of ostentatious buildings, by which he thought to impress upon the world the magnificence of his government. And as column of stone and

efflorescent capital rose up amongst the mud-built houses of Palestine, the Jews marvelled. They bowed before this 'might and majesty,' this portentous show of worldly power, and passed by on the other side, studying their holy books with blinking, screwed-up eyes. Herod was a product of his age, with something added. He had the ability of a Roman, the tastes of a Greek, and the heart of a heathen; and there was a madness, a passion, a genius in him that was his own. There is no doubt he had a soul capable of being saved. From the standpoint of psychology, few figures in history offer more interest. He who could cast a javelin, ride a horse, command an army, better than any, was, when it came to the affairs that concerned his own personal life, utterly innocent. Doubt it not that there was in Herod's character an element of true greatness.

But whatever may be said in his defence, the man possessed a black stomach all right. We read that when he had Malichus, the murderer of his father, stabbed to death on the seashore, Hyrcanus, the peace-loving Asmonæan, 'was immediately affrighted till he swooned away, and fell down at the surprise he was in.' This gentle prince was destined to endure many other such surprises.

He himself, at the age of eighty, being 'over-fond of his own country,' was to fall a victim to Herod's insatiable jealousy. No one was safe. Because the populace wept to see Hyrcanus' grandson, 'dressed in the historic vestments', officiate as high priest before the altar, wept at recognizing the grace of their ruling house manifested in the sensitive, handsome looks of this boy of eighteen, Herod must needs have him treacherously drowned in one of his fish-ponds of Jericho. 'Dipped,' as the old histories tell us, in play that was no play, by Galatian soldiers on a warm summer night.

With the blood of her grandfather and of her brother upon his hands, his love for Mariamne remained unabated. He was so deeply in love with her 'in his soul,' that he was unable to get quit of her. 'Yea, many there be that have run out of their wits for women, and become servants for their sakes.' The unassuageable desire he felt for the body of this haughty girl who carried herself so daintily, obsessed him, possessed him quite. He who could conquer the world was a slave to this young and arrogant Jewess who inflamed him 'every day to a great degree by the unspeakable beauty of her body.' Confident of her power, she behaved herself 'after a saucy manner,' nor did she

spare him who was dumb on account of his affection for her. She repulsed his advances, mocked at the lowness of his descent, made light of his ambitions and glory, and finally refused to allow him to gratify his desire upon her, refused to be 'humbled,' until in a passion of love and hate Herod one day leapt out of bed, and, running about the palace after 'a wild manner,' gave orders that she should be killed. The woman went to her death 'without changing the colour of her face.'

Mariamne was dead, but the power of her witchery prevailed still. The infatuated king could not rid his mind of the memory of her – of his wife. The thought of her tormented him, haunted him. His unbridled lust still recognized no curb. The gates of the grave could not prevail against it. The Jews used to say that he kept her body preserved 'with honey out of the rock.' The memory of her, her gestures, her proud looks, pursued him. Remorse for his hasty action made him mad. He contrived feasts to divert his mind from thinking of her. Remorse was with him as he sat at table, clothed in purple, and as he lay on his couch, guarded by his favourite eunuchs. No balm of Gilead could soothe or allay the fever in his blood. He complained of pains at the back of his head.

Pretending to hunt, he wandered about like 'an unclean spirit' through waterless places, 'seeking rest and finding none.' But Mariamne was in the wilderness also. The thought of her was sufficient to torment him, to turn his brain. In the darkened corridors of his palace he was heard often to call to her; and when the ghost of the one he had loved, of the one he had married and murdered, was tardy in coming, he would tell his servants to go and fetch her.

It was but the beginning of his troubles, for he was to be mightily tormented. He had exposed his weakness, and there were those about him eager enough to take advantage of such signs. The 'wild disorders' of the palace were not to end here. 'The horse-leech hath two daughters, crying, Give, Give!' By means of flattery and calumny, here a little and there a little, did the king receive instructions. In consequence, his insanity, his jealous fury, was presently directed against Mariamne's sons, his own two incomparable boys, Alexander and Aristobulus. 'Grand secrets' were disclosed, until in an open court at Beirût we see the father pleading against the lives of his two sons, and his enemies, moved *out of hatred of the king*, passing

a verdict of guilty against them. They also met their death – by strangulation in the ancient and sinister city of Samaria, or Sebaste, as it had been now renamed.

'Then,' records the old chronicler, 'did the ghosts of Alexander and Aristobulus go round all the palace.' The very shadows of night cried out against the king, murmuring warnings and reproaches. Not gold, not silver, not silk or purple, could assuage the monarch's suffering. Though to a great age the physical vigour of the man remained unabated, sleep left him, and he would rise in the night to call upon his dead. Was ever the crowned head of a king visited with such a visitation? What matter that he bought pigeons for his palace in Jerusalem, or that he paved the great square of Antioch, or that he built theatres in Damascus? Little did it profit him to be lord of sticks and stones, when such a malady was upon his soul. Dark words, dark deeds, accumulated about his life. The man who worshipped glory had a common worm gnawing at his heart. And so it continued until the end, until at the age of seventy he was carried to the waters of Callirhoe, near the Dead Sea, and 'dipped,' by the advice of his physician, into a vat of hot oil, 'in order to warm

him.' The remedy proved all but fatal, and he was conveyed back to Jericho a dying man.

It was then there happened one of those events that revealed a gap which separated him from his subjects. Upon a false rumour of his death reaching Jerusalem, certain young men, under the influence of two rabbis, Yehuda ben Tzarifa and Mattathias ben Margaloth, cut down with axes the great golden eagle of Rome which Herod had caused to be set up over the temple door. It was done in broad daylight, and the king was not slow to understand the full import of the insubordinate demonstration. It availed him little to burn alive the two 'sages of Israel,' to execute the youths. He recognized in that hour that all his lifelong efforts to benefit and placate his 'stolen' people had failed. These passive resisters had not abstained from openly affronting him, even in his lifetime. He knew now for sure their mood and their temper. The nation despised him, condemned him, rejoiced over his misfortunes. He would die, but there would be none to mourn him. Awakened thus rudely from his moribund torments, he summoned a number of the leading men of Israel into one of his foreign hippodromes, giving orders that upon his death they should be

massacred, so that in spite of all, and against the wishes of all, his death-day should be a day of mourning in Israel. The disease from which the old king suffered was a most horrible one. He was consumed by a burning fever, his body itched, a terrible stench rose from his lungs, those organs so necessary to the life of mortals, his intestines were ulcerated, and yet he was afflicted with an inordinate appetite, and as a last ghastly indignity his privy member began to breed worms.

There he lay in his chamber at Jericho, with the balsam trees and palm trees waving backwards and forwards in the sultry breezes of that humid place, his mind reviewing the long years behind him. Once again in retrospect he stood before the Sanhedrin, a young man summoned out of Galilee to answer for the life of Hezekiah and those of the other patriot robbers he had executed. There he stood, in the flower of his manhood, with steel armour showing beneath his floating purple cloak. Once again under those very trees he heard amid the splashing water and feigned laughter the gasping cries of the boy priest; once more, as he pared an apple with his own hand, 'as was his custom,' he conjured up the very movements, the very looks of Cleopatra, 'the harlot queen of

him.' The remedy proved all but fatal, and he was conveyed back to Jericho a dying man.

It was then there happened one of those events that revealed a gap which separated him from his subjects. Upon a false rumour of his death reaching Jerusalem, certain young men, under the influence of two rabbis, Yehuda ben Tzarifa and Mattathias ben Margaloth, cut down with axes the great golden eagle of Rome which Herod had caused to be set up over the temple door. It was done in broad daylight, and the king was not slow to understand the full import of the insubordinate demonstration. It availed him little to burn alive the two 'sages of Israel,' to execute the youths. He recognized in that hour that all his lifelong efforts to benefit and placate his 'stolen' people had failed. These passive resisters had not abstained from openly affronting him, even in his lifetime. He knew now for sure their mood and their temper. The nation despised him, condemned him, rejoiced over his misfortunes. He would die, but there would be none to mourn him. Awakened thus rudely from his moribund torments, he summoned a number of the leading men of Israel into one of his foreign hippodromes, giving orders that upon his death they should be

massacred, so that in spite of all, and against the wishes of all, his death-day should be a day of mourning in Israel. The disease from which the old king suffered was a most horrible one. He was consumed by a burning fever, his body itched, a terrible stench rose from his lungs, those organs so necessary to the life of mortals, his intestines were ulcerated, and yet he was afflicted with an inordinate appetite, and as a last ghastly indignity his privy member began to breed worms.

There he lay in his chamber at Jericho, with the balsam trees and palm trees waving backwards and forwards in the sultry breezes of that humid place, his mind reviewing the long years behind him. Once again in retrospect he stood before the Sanhedrin, a young man summoned out of Galilee to answer for the life of Hezekiah and those of the other patriot robbers he had executed. There he stood, in the flower of his manhood, with steel armour showing beneath his floating purple cloak. Once again under those very trees he heard amid the splashing water and feigned laughter the gasping cries of the boy priest; once more, as he pared an apple with his own hand, 'as was his custom,' he conjured up the very movements, the very looks of Cleopatra, 'the harlot queen of

that the Eternal, the Absolute, the God who alone sustains both mind and matter, should occupy himself with the daughters of men at this rate! Surely there was an indecorum in such a concentration of lively interest. A maid upon an obscure planet, carrying a water-jar upon her head, selling peas in the market, or spreading a bundle of fodder before an ass, how inconceivable that she should be connected in time and space for the fulfilment of metaphysical purposes entirely out of accord with the spirit of the natural universe. It has been affirmed that the bones of men have been upturned in gravel-beds two hundred thousand years old. For interminable ages man has existed, 'a living spirit,' seeing, listening, gruffly articulating, before ever the rise of Egypt and Babylon. These lonesome former years of man stretch back into a dim and inconceivable past. Always his life has been regulated by a certain natural law in things, a certain natural gravitation. Plagues have decimated him, and appalling planetary convulsions have made his life a terror, convulsions, the results of which have been cancelled by the same imperturbable drift of life that creates and destroys with equal indifference in its prolonged process of unmoved progression. Shelving glaciers swept

down upon the valleys; and presently, as the centuries passed, the banks and slopes of the earth were once more being warmed by a sun dazzling and clear. In such long intervals of relaxation, man prospered, separating himself, ever more and more, from the quick birds, the fleet animals, the lizards and slippery fish, separating himself, as, with dedicated back and concentrated purpose, he chipped out rude stone weapons with which to kill. And these ancestors of ours, these ancestors of Abraham, increased still in cunning, until upon their bowed shoulders our long destiny was assured.

Out of the seed of Abraham there had sprung up a tender sapling, a white almond-bough of spring-time, a branch of righteousness. In the borders of Herod's kingdom a God had been born. It was a startling and unforeseen consummation; a consummation that was to fortify the wavering steps of many men with new hope, new aspirations. Here was a clue at last, an illumination, an unexpected thread in a dismal jungle. The kingdoms of this world rose and fell in commonplace manifestations. The involved progress of cause and effect remained unregenerate and heathen, yet above and below its dread sequence there existed now an incredible disclosure, to be handed down from generation

to generation. This, then, was the upshot of all Abraham's stir. By the people sprung from his loins there had been formed a new relationship with the Creator. It was an audacious conception; and to-day, as one stands under the shadows of great Christian cathedrals, or within the quiet garths of churches, monasteries, chantries, and chapels, it is not easy to dispute its truth. Priests mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross in our infancy, and are at our sides at the hour of death. They direct us in our lives and conduct our wrapped-up corpses to the burial – can these grave men be mistaken? Are their ancient usages no more valid than were the hidden religious performances of archaic Egypt? Must we look elsewhere for solutions, for explanations? Can it be that all this mystical assurance is but as incense, but as summer mists rising above the blackberry hedges of the solid earth? Life is deep, deeper than can be imagined, and very sombre. Words deceive and fancies are treacherous. Like foolish quails, our heads are apt to be caught in strange webs. The sun, the planets, the moon, and the stars, set in infinitude, affright the familiar earth lost in space with its buttercup-grass and cattle and sweet-smelling, life-giving soil. She has trembled like a

young mother; and man, the child of her womb, cognizant also of a great fear, traffics with mysteries. The blue sky, the blue sea, the green fields with their broad oaks and shivering poplars, declare a message. With emphasis they demand a release, and man's brain, man's hungry soul, has given it. What matter that the complicated edifice of human thought has so slight a foundation? Whenever the narrow, long-shaped, five-toed print of man's foot is raised out of the mud, there is perfidy. Infants we are, crying for warranties which cannot be given. In all the teachings and thoughts of our fathers we may look for deceits. The force of gravitation works close to the ground. Nature mistrusts mind and favours its wildest delusions, and who has the wit and the daring to cut through the phantom epochs of recorded history? What dramas, what ironies, are scattered abroad! What incredible misconceptions! The meaning of the life of man is bitter. We remain falsely consoled. It can hardly be doubted that Christianity itself, with all its confused dogmas, with all its spiritual convictions, is but the happy vision of a famished people wandering parched and aimless and lost in 'a waste land.'

And yet, if Christianity is not true, what an

insight into the methods of obdurate nature is obtained by the last two thousand years. Millions upon millions of men, women, and children have been disburdened and comforted by a Barnaby bright madness created for them by the passionate genius of an Oriental peasant whose sublime and infectious self-confidence was itself but a delusion. And beneath it all, the stream of ubiquity still flows forward, equally indulgent to truth and to falsehood, obedient only to its own laws, as is the way with water. Out of evil comes forth good, and out of good comes forth evil. Out of lies comes forth truth, and out of truth come forth lies. Hurricanes pass over our heads, and yet the still, small voice of God remains unheard. Our lives are encompassed by counterfeits, material and spiritual, and the loftiest expression of our kind has its roots in madness. Nothing is sure, nothing is certain. And those who cannot acquire the taste to be gulled must gather what serenity they may by the poetical contemplation of the tide of existence, as it sweeps forward and ever forward towards the ocean of oblivion.

Herod the Great and his tyrannical government of Jewry was but the immediate manifestation of the massive material age of which he was a product.

Under the practical and ruthless genius of the Romans, a great culmination of history had taken place, an empire had been established on a scale unprecedented and unimagined. Beneath its heavy force, its greedy ordinances, the wayward and fickle nations of the East had been roughly brought to their senses. Accident and avarice had involved a single people with weighty responsibilities. The physical body of the great organization was strong enough to bear the burden of the Western world for many generations, but not so its satiated soul. An inalienable weariness was already sapping its vigour. All that wealth could provide was to be had. Matter spread out her largess, and behold, her merchandise was found to be little short of alloy! 'All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.' There was a sadness, a profound disenchantment, below the drooping eyelids of these rulers who had won to themselves all the kingdoms. The government of the shrewd Octavius had been succeeded by that of Tiberius, who became emperor when Jesus was still but a boy. Nothing can offer a more revealing contrast than the mood of this unhappy man when compared with that of his obscure subject whose influence was to subvert the very foundations of

society. The world is malleable, nothing is impossible; and while Tiberius in his island retreat had control of the Roman Empire, holding it, as he used to say, 'like a wolf by the ears,' a simple Oriental carpenter was preparing the way for a new kingdom of mysterious and incalculable import. Never can I look upon the hard, classical outlines of the island-cliffs of Capri, as they front the midnight Mediterranean stars, but my mind reverts to that inland sea of sweet, fresh drinking-water, of living water, along the shores of which Jesus walked. About the intellectual Roman ruler were gathered the flute-players, the dancing-girls, explicit of delicate villa-refinements, and about the other, simple, ignorant fishermen, with horny, naked feet! For the seeds sown by the secret desert-meditations of Abraham were still quick. In the dark cellarage of the pagan palace they would soon be sprouting like mustard and cress. Let the Roman world weigh never so heavily, these Israelites possessed a loadstone that would draw its iron bands apart. While the lamps and torches of Jove's Villa were shining bright from the foliage-tufted cliffs, while the proud promontories of Capri projected their stern foreheads over the lapping moon-silvered Neapolitan sea, this extra-

ordinary people were turning themselves back upon the legendary teachings of their race. They read and re-read the Scriptures, and with sturdy confidence hearkened to the voices of their own dead seers.

The Roman lion slept at ease within the meshes of his material net, little suspecting that sharp teeth day and night were gnawing at the tangible threads of his bondage. At Bethlehem, in the hill-country of Judea, a deliverer was to be born from the house of David, a deliverer who would exalt this insignificant and stubborn people so that the Gentile emperors would fall from their thrones like so many overripe medlars. It was a fantastic faith, a hopeless hope, narrow, limited, provincial, when set against the reality of the world as it was. Up and down the road of the Promised Land marched invincible foreign legions. The Jews looked at them with aloof glances, silent, significant, and fortified by occult predictions. On the outward face of things their cause was already lost, yet they remained undaunted, concentrating their attention with impassioned zeal upon the ancient scrolls of their fathers' inspiration. An unequal struggle it would have seemed, the spiritual patriotism of these 'feeble Jews' against the workaday strength of the Romans.

The pent-up fire broke out at last, but, as so often happens, where it was least expected. Under Providence the anticipations of the children of Abraham were justified, but justified in such a way that the final issue which taught the peoples of the world to snatch at the coat of the Jew did nothing but set their teeth on edge. The suppressed ardour of their souls had spontaneously created fire, had brought fire down from heaven; but behold, it had not been recognized by them as the pure element, and this exceptional people suffered the humiliation of witnessing the wrong kind of fire spreading further and further abroad over the world. To-day they still register their protest. The years of their travail were accomplished, and behold, when brought to bed, the longed-for offspring was no king's son. Their victory was a defeat. The tinder was dry, the spark lit the flax, but it was not as they had thought. All was different; and this people, who have ever been incapable of readjusting their preconceptions, could do naught but stand aside in surly displeasure. It was a Gentile God that they had begot, a God who could allow them, the chosen people, to be dispersed to the ends of the world, and Jerusalem to be utterly destroyed. The situation is full of

ironies. Was ever such a trick played upon a God-fearing people?

Yet what a deep sigh of relief went up from the Gentiles, labouring, staggering, under the lading of life, dreary and unrelieved! A word, a message, tidings of great joy, had been brought to them. In their thick darkness an authentic word had reached their ears. Salvation had come at last. A true interpretation of all the mystery about them, a simple interpretation of the sluggish un-understandable world. They had heard before of rumoured incarnations; and now it had happened. In order to reassure men, God had taken on human flesh, had been born upon the earth, had come in mortal guise to reason with them, to embolden them, lost as they were. What they had desired to hear they were now told. Crass casualty no longer triumphed. Values other than rude violence were supreme. Wickedness would be cast down, 'and that without hands.' Behold, the gentle wind of hope was wafted to them through the vexed palm trees of the East. Merely to believe in the word uttered was sufficient for salvation. Merely to believe, and to follow the moral demands of this new teaching! The dream of life was but a preliminary ground of moral exercise. Its importunity

was sham; reality lay beyond. 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.' Death, that diligent tyrant, had fallen, fallen from his high estate. In those early days, the foul breath from a dead man's mouth counted for nothing. In the light of this new revelation, the early martyrs gladly embraced the old eternal enemy of man. They flocked to the stake. They were eager to be incriminated as Christians. In one city hundreds of them asked to be put to death, so that they might win the more quickly their heavenly crowns. 'Begone, you wretches,' cried the amazed Roman governor. 'If you are so bent on death, you have precipices and ropes.'

And then, little by little, it became certain that the end of the world was not at hand. 'Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' The faith lost its first transports, became staid and sober, and accommodated itself to the mundane progress of history – grew at last to be part of it. It happens always thus. The draught of religion has poison

in it. It is in the nature of the liquor to send men mad. It rises to the brain, it courses through the blood, and, like shipwrecked sailors who lap up salt water, those who drink of this broth rave. Only when such wild wisdom has become stabilized by custom, by formality, can it survive. Only by wont does such refreshment become innocuous. Then, and only then, can the priests have their way with it, shouting out their miracles at the public conduits, chanting to God at their altars. *Hoc est corpus!*

To-day we are permitted to see them at it in England, in Europe, and in America; yes, upon half the face of the globe, in hours of despair, and in the hour of death, humanity still turns to them. Valiantly, with soft words, they would assuage our universal sorrows, outfacing death, our universal woe. Consider the innumerable cathedrals, abbeys, churches, chapels, tin tabernacles, that send up their crooked smoke to God. And yet, who cherishes the living soul of the aged master of Corpus, whose body, as a boy, I saw carried out of the college-gates by a troop of black-and-white undertakers? In what hidden place lurks the spirit of old Dickon, of whose death I heard this morning? On many a winter's day had he gone after

wild-fowl, his heavy boots treading with stealthy lightness over the frozen Abbotsbury reeds; on many a late evening had he picked up a rabbit, to squeeze with firm, thoughtless thumb yellow urine from its belly – and who would dare to assert that his soul still lives in realms far removed from those ruled over by the king of England? 'So man lieth down, and riseth not, till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.'

In my journey to Palestine, the most exciting moment I experienced came suddenly and secretly upon me when the ship in which I travelled was sailing past Sûr. The sea lay blue and clear under a blue sky; and there, beyond the sheltered plain that spreads behind what once was the ancient city of Tyre, were the sloping mountains over which Jesus had walked. I think my emotion was due to the fact that I knew I was looking for the first time in my life upon ground, upon dust of the planet Earth, that had actually supported the human feet of Christ. At that moment, even into a heart as naturally heathen as mine, there came a strange awakening, a vivid awareness of the story, such as no sacred sentence had ever been able to

evoke. Over these yellow slopes Jesus had once made his way. Sheltering under the carob trees, he had looked down upon the winding sea-banks of this selfsame coast. Here his eyes had unconsciously observed casual wayside stones. Here he had listened to the hum of honey-hungry hornets among the sticky red-stemmed leaves above his head, here he had seen eagles – 'as long as her flight lasted the air was shaken, but there remains no path behind her' – pass across the sky, and had watched small brown low-flying birds flit before him from tussock to tussock. In the rich chiff-chaff orchards of Somerset, or upon the high downlands of Dorset where the turf is so fresh and close-grown, it had been a difficult matter to envisage the physical presence of the Levantine Jesus. Not so here; these high sun-drenched hillsides on that still autumn afternoon became eloquent of their traditional privilege. And with so typical a topographical background before my eyes, the personality of Christ stood out amid the disorders of the centuries. I know not with what mysterious intimations of things seen my imagination stole back into the past. Out of the manifest records of the Scriptures, so different from any other writing, Jesus came into being. No longer was he a man

with 'wine-coloured hair,' enshadowed in sacrosanct incense. He was a veritable son of man, with firm knuckled hands capable of growing hot and smelling sweet in the sun, with knees that were pliable, and with a heart that beat with the reiterated pulsations of all animal-flesh, of lizards, and trout, and leopards. He was a Jew, dark-skinned, and with eyes bright and illumined with genius.

His nature, it is plain, had two sides to it: the one separated, tranquil, calm, and the other impetuous, hasty, passionate, and proud. He who gave no heed to art, who was negligent of culture, was himself a supreme artist. Intolerant of the world, he was never weary of inveighing against those who establish themselves in hard-set thoughts and phrases. Nothing pleased this 'most interesting of decadents' better than to undermine with a swift single utterance the complacence of the well-satisfied. It is the daring of his spirit, with its subversive impulse, that commands the admiration, the adoration, of heretics and atheists, even unto this hour. The old revolutionary wilfulness was in his very blood; and though generations of churchmen have strained to conceal this fact, the withering fire of his unbalanced and unsubdued

nature flashes out through their polite subterfuges. He was no Saviour of the mild and meek Christological conception, to be set up in a shrine with bleeding heart and clasped hands. He was wayward and very damaging. From the point of view of constituted society, his teaching is so perverse that any strict adherence to it is impracticable. Just as the yea-kernel and the nay-kernel are couched in a single almond-nut, so truth, let all scoffers hear, is contained in opposites. The words that issued from him were full of sublimely inspired *contradictions*. Their unity was informed only by the inner passion of his unique and incomparable temperament. He came amongst the people of his country a solitary and unexampled soul. On no occasion could any one foretell what he would think or how he would act. He remained vulnerable, open to all influences, free, uncommitted, save only in the one matter of his own secret confidence.

The men he had to do with were for the most part fishermen, with hands hardened by the laying of pots and the hauling of large draw-nets, leaded and buoyed. They followed him in amazement. The grace and ambiguity of his personality, purged of all cant, of all pretence and affectation, provoked

in their direct and honest hearts an ardent veneration and loyalty. No man had ever spoken as he spoke, no man had been like to him. His meditations, his words, his most inconsequent actions, made an impression upon their uncultivated minds that the passing years could not obliterate. Amid persecutions and wars and rumours of wars, Saint Peter, even unto his great old age, could recall the very accents of his beloved prophet, as he had heard them by river, and by lake, and upon green banks. And this man – who had been used to clutching slippery fish in a boat's bottom, who had been used to push at an oar, naked except for a loin-cloth, used to standing stationary like a heron, casting-net in hand – reserved in his untrained memory glimpses of Jesus that have left their stamp upon every phase of human thought.

'O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord.' How is it possible to account for the peculiar beauty, so realistic, so perfect, so anything but 'rococo in taste,' of the disciple's narrative, in any other way than by the ardour of a devotion stirred beyond the confines of art? Jesus bewitched the soul of Simon, and then broke it with love. The man could not rid his brain of

the domination of those wonderful months. It was quite useless for him to start up in the assembly and abruptly announce, 'I go a-fishing.' He had seen a God, he had listened to a God, and he knew it. If the effect of his simple memorabilia has altered the history of the world, what divine emanations must have outspread from Jesus as he walked along those mountain roads, or broke bread at table in sunny native cottages!

Long afterwards, perhaps at the time of the persecutions of Nero, the memory of all that had happened during those free days of his vigorous manhood was as fresh in the tough, tenacious memory of Saint Peter as though they had happened yesterday. He could recollect it all, the crowds gathering about Jesus 'at even, when the sun had set,' the drooping figure of Jesus asleep in the hinder part of his boat, his head resting on the leathern cushion filled with date-plum fibre; the curing of his wife's mother from her lake-side fever better than any apothecary; the innumerable highway discussions; the unexpected sudden departures of his master to pray in the village outskirts; his own 'slowness of heart'; his own sudden audacious belief; the anguish and agitation of those last days of 'great fulfilment' in Jerusalem; his own

personal betrayal of his master, the ghastly afternoon of the crucifixion; and the subsequent supernatural rumours, so easily acceptable to a mind stored with love, but at the same time untutored and credulous. With the murmur of Rome about his ears, Simon, the fresh-water loach-catcher, over whose bones was to be raised the great edifice of St. Peter's, put on record, word by word, through his interpreter John Mark, his vision of the past, his eager countrymen as he remembered them, their crowded villages echoing with the sound of millstones in the daytime, and in evening lighted with candles, the open, unhedged acres of corn through which they had been used to walk in their dusty sandals, loitering by the tare-grown, cockle-grown ruts, plucking the thin yellow ears while they listened to their master's talk. Happy, liberal days they had been, and their glamour was retained still in that aged skull, in that round, sacred skull, which knew every current of the far-off lake – or sea, as he chose with local pride to call it – and just where the fish liked best to feed when the wind was in the south. Jesus used always to address his staunch disciple as Simon. He eventually nicknamed him Peter, but even then he liked best to use his original name. It is clear that the frank and

free disposition of the man appealed to him. He rested on his sterling worth, and from his very limitations derived comfort. When Saint Peter made his pronouncement of faith on the road to Cæsarea Philippi, Jesus could only bless him. It was incredible to him that the mind of Saint Peter could have made so desperate a leap without divine aid; but the love the fisherman felt was very deep. He looked, he listened, and he stored all away in his memory – proverbs, paradoxes, parables. That beloved and most blessed master, who had first arrested his naïve attention by driving many basketfuls of fish into his seine-net ('Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord'), was now for ever fixed in his mind. Christ's humility, his fecklessness, his gift for ready response, who could forget them? His mysterious, unexplained confidence, his unfaltering purpose, his hidden, audacious convictions, how rememorable they were! No experience in Saint Peter's long life ever approached the emotions he had felt during those brief years of fortunate companionship. He could have listened for ever to the words that fell from those lips, words charged with a disarming mystical grace, like rain on a land parched with dog-day drought, words enigmatic and pointed,

and hard to be understood, words weighted with strange, deep meanings, different from any he had ever heard, words of prophecy, of blasphemous audacity, of pure, childlike love.

This was no man he had known, no mortal could have spoken as he had spoken, rising early and late to call men to salvation. Each incident of that privileged intercourse stuck fast, sank deep into the hidden wells of his unconscious being. 'All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee?' His very marrow bore witness of what he had known, his old muscles hardened by toil were taut with it. He had gone out in his boat and had met a God upon the waters. The fish, with their round, glassy eyes rimmed with gold, with orange-crimson, were nothing to him now, his craft in mending nets, holding the mesh tight with his toes, nothing, his knowledge of the weather-signs in that cupped valley – all were forgotten. It was not of such things, of such wonted homely lore, that his mind brooded, as he was being led to his death. The world must believe as he believed. It was not for him now 'to be slack in praising God.' With such an exultation in men's hearts, all sorrows and suffering would stop. Let them but believe in his master, who was even now far away in his father's

mansion, working weal for the froward populations, preparing for the last day, when he would come again, riding upon the clouds, to judge all, and to gather the good fish 'into vessels.' He had denied him thrice in the high priest's vestibule, but never, never again, not if all the crested cocks in the world were to crow, would he be so caught; and with unquestioning candour he handed down, for all time, the story of his weakness, and of the significant tender glance, so intimate, so full of confederate knowledge, that had reached him with the slap of an arrow in a target, as he stood warming himself by the charcoal brazier, the smell of the wine of the Last Supper still upon his breath.

'Miracles do not happen.' This plain statement, uttered by Matthew Arnold fifty years ago, has from the beginning of the world been true. Arguments on such subjects are either insincere or very foolish. Water cannot be turned into wine, loaves of bread cannot be mysteriously multiplied, men cannot come to life again.

More than two million Mohammedans believe that their prophet visited Jerusalem, riding upon the back of the horse Borak through the night-sky. No Christian would give credence to such an

Arabian Night's tale for a moment. It is the same with our own treasured stories. 'Miracles do not happen.' This axiom may be taken for granted in the serious consideration of all religions, whether they derive from China, India, Syria, or Arabia. How persistently the clergy obscure the issue, trying to fit all life to their petty preconceptions! How bitterly they fought against the theory of evolution, changing their arguments at every turn. Have they not heard, do they not know, that a certain integrity of mind, a ruthless sincerity, is more dear to God than are a thousand offerings of blind faith? They are not of our turn. The great excommunicated crusader, Frederick, caused the monks of Acre to be flogged through the streets during every day of Holy Week. I'll be bound they got little less than their deserts. Most of us are so driven by the necessity of getting food for our children, that we are unable to give any concentrated attention to matters of religion. Desire discomforts us, death confounds us, and we naturally turn toward these men who claim to know the truth. Folly, foolishness! These are not of the kind that learn to face unpalatable facts. Bring what arguments you may against them, they will still confuse all, hunching their necks like ferrets

in a hutch, quick-jumping like squirrels, diving like slippery seals. They beguile us, they cause us to yaw. In our difficult predicament, when, if ever, we require cool wits, they befuddle and enfeeble us with their sweet, sickly syrups.

Yet the spirit of the thing may be true. It is quite clear that a strange mystical power does sometimes possess simple and devout souls. I have witnessed it myself. I have been aware of it in the presence of Stuckey Coles, that good and blessed man, as I stood by his side long ago in the attic of his house at Seaton, watching the sun come up over the English Channel. 'The eternal wisdom of God . . . has shown itself forth in all things, but chiefly in the mind of men, and most of all in Jesus Christ.' It is possible that there is more in this rumour than some of us look for. Christian arguments are false arguments, Christian thoughts shallow thoughts; yet, even so, these prayerful madcaps have hold, perhaps, of some invisible clue denied to ruder natures. And it is with such an assumption in our minds that we must approach the legendary fables on which they lay such store. The yearnings of the human heart have created a religious poetry, pure and primitive, and it would be unbecoming to mock at the expression of so

much authentic feeling. Symbolism it is, allegory it is, but it is also the voice of deep-hidden longings, the child of tears. Conceived in this way it may be possible for us to regard these infantile and presumptuous displays without irritation.

Yesterday I visited a little Italian cellar where had been arranged a primitive 'presepio' in preparation for Christmas. There the immortal and beautiful story was all laid out under yellow quinces and hanging garlic – the tiny image in the manger, the sheep, the cattle, the sceptred kings of the East! In a life where all is at random, how reassuring was this simple representation of our deliverance! With the shadows of the island oak trees falling so lightly, so gently across the terraced walls of the garden-plots, objective historical facts seemed of small account. The unequalled tale was cherished still. In tangible, visible form these foreign children, with their moss and lichen and plaster figures, had offered their contribution to the strange, sad drama. The same impulse that had prompted them in their play had long ago brought to birth the original story, so candid and so lovely. Small wonder that artists have responded passionately to these incomparable imaginings invented out of sticks and straws. Simple thought,

of such is the kingdom of heaven. The grave night-sky was broken for a purpose, was suddenly alive with a heavenly host. The pastoral talk of the shepherds might well in this way have been interrupted. With their shining crooks on their knees, with the memories of their loves in their heads, they may well have sprung to their feet, awakened in the white winter night to devout adoration. Mystery above us, mystery below us, what wonder if we dream dreams in the artless fashion of children? It lingers on, this poetic Christian tale, so dear to the desolate heart astray amid unconscious matter. Just as the books of Homer hold us by the simplicity of their golden poetry, so do these others. At Christmas the most hoodwinked mind awakes and pauses enraptured to hear once more the carol-singers, as they pass the laurustinus, treading with audible crunch the damp gravel of the drive. Under the stars the front gate clicks upon its latch, and behold, the gate is a gate into an infinite space, homely and prodigal of human security.

'The labour-pains came upon her at the trunk of a palm tree.' There can be no doubt that in actual fact Jesus Christ was born, not in a manger of Bethlehem, but in a little house in the hillside

village of Nazareth, 'the flower of Galilee.' The birth of this child, 'a span long,' whose name in Hebrew means 'He shall save,' was unheralded; and in all probability he was the legitimate son of a humble artisan whose name was Joseph. 'And Joseph, to whom was espoused the Virgin Mary, begot Jesus, who was called the Messiah.' This is the ungarbled record of the ancient Syriac manuscript recently discovered in the monastery of Mount Sinai. The Jews have had many inventions to narrate of the childhood of Jesus. They have not hesitated to call the Saviour of the world 'a child of the saddle.' He was, so they affirm, the 'straw-brat' of Pandera, a Roman soldier stationed at Nazareth; and when they refer to him in their scurrilous papers, it is always as 'that bastard.' They suggest that he was a boy full of precocity, an innocent, who, when his father pulled his ears, would answer pertly, 'Vex me not'; a child who would use his eager intelligence to pose his schoolteacher, the good Khazzan of the synagogue, and who would not be 'cockled' into obedience and correct behaviour.

Apart from the Christian story of his having been found disputing with the elders in the temple, nothing authentic is known of his early

life. For thirty odd years he lived in obscurity, staking his father's vineyards, walking between the acres of tall, thin-eared barley on the crests of the hills which surrounded his home, and making yokes and ploughs and ox-goads, some of which were actually seen by Justin Martyr three centuries later. Yet during those years, while each month the moon spread its soft radiance over the ashen limestone habitations of that fair mountain village, the young man was gathering nourishment for his spirit, was saturating his mind with ancient writings of his race. His native land, the land that God had given to the children of Abraham, groaned under the violence of proud oppressors; and with the sound of the trampling heels of the marching legions in his ears, the sensitive personality of Jesus shrank further and further back upon itself. 'Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.'

For many generations no prophet had risen in Israel. It was as though the spiritual influence of the Greeks and the material domination of the Romans for all time had quelled this particular gift of the Jews. 'We see not our signs: there is

no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.'

And then suddenly during the manhood of Jesus this period of silence was at an end. The peace, the hush, was broken by the voice of John the Baptist. This aberrant man had gone down to the wild country of the river Jordan, and there, clothed in a camel's skin, had suddenly 'given tongue.' It was the ancient crying, the old prophetic crying; and as his calls rose up from the rustling osier-beds, like the grunting of a lone lion, the souls of the Jews trembled in native reciprocity. They listened. There it was again, loud and clear. This time they could not be mistaken. They dismounted from their beasts of burden, they laid down their tools and their pruning-hooks, they were sure of it, the voice of a prophet had once more been heard in the land. Without hesitation, in great multitudes, they hurried to the marshes of the Jordan, and behold, when John saw them coming, he scourged them with words. John the baptizer regarded neither king nor people. The sweaty caps came at his bidding as snakes answer to the voice of a charmer; but when they stood before him, he cried, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to

flee from the wrath to come? Repent! Repent! Repent!' His reiterated cry was uttered, so they learned, in order to hasten the coming of 'the day of consolation,' to prepare by means of a national regeneration for the appearance of one greater than himself, for the Messiah. The official teachers and leaders of the people gave little heed to the prophet. They thought he was possessed of the devil. John upbraided them, scoffed at them. They hoped, he said, to escape from the final destruction merely by being the children of Abraham. God could raise up children unto Abraham of the rocks and boulders of the river! The commoners shivered. Under his sway, and in obedience to his admonition, they made their confessions, and, as one man, went down into the water for baptism 'for the remission of their sins.' The uncouth crying that came to their ears out of the shaken reeds was to them pregnant with meaning. 'Behold, I send to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the day of the Lord, the great and terrible day.' Surely momentous events were upon the wind, a fanning, a sifting, a baptism with fire, the long-looked-for apocalypse.

With the rest came Jesus of Nazareth. The spiritual passion, dangerous as electricity, of John

the Baptist was exactly calculated to stir his heart and inspire him. Amid the wild Jordan scenery, with hyenas heaving with sleep in the tamarisk thickets, with blue sun-birds in the white poplars, with a culver seeking for a place to rest 'the sole of her foot' above his head, he became aware of a flashing imperative. It was he, he alone, who was the promised Messiah, the 'branch of righteousness,' the saviour of Israel. For years, in his comings-in and goings-out, he had been meditating upon the Messianic prophecies, and now, as the heavens opened above the historic river, their meaning had been revealed. The audacity of his secret thought troubled him deeply, and it is recorded that after his baptism the spirit 'drove him' into the wilderness. It was there, in the lonely mountain, that this man whose magnanimity has meant so much to us strengthened himself for his heroic venture. He had seen the disease, the sorrow, and suffering of the Jews, the sorrow and suffering of all life; and a compassion, tender and noble, had led him to believe that it was he, Jesus of Galilee, who could save. Through the old barbarous notion of vicarious sacrifice it could be done. It was a strange, wild, ill-balanced ideal, an ideal alien and antipathetic to beings whose temper of mind is

different. It was a purpose beyond the circle of ordinary human intention, a purpose incalculable, outside good and evil.

For forty days he remained in solitude, alone with his own meditations, with the ghul, with shadows, and with wild beasts. The little rock-rabbits came out in the late afternoon and dodged behind the high rocks above him, the last rays of each departing sun glanced down upon the prickly burnet-tufts, and upon the faces of his audience of silent ant-hills and dead stones; while Jesus, a solitary human figure, gathered to himself resolution for the fulfilment of his sublime idea. Very early in his mission, it seems, he understood that his secret purpose would require him to suffer persecutions.

This, then, was the outcome of the religious passion of the Jews. 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast chosen us of all nations.' The religion of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Moses, of Elijah, of Samuel, of David, of Isaiah, concentrated, pressed down through the long years, had reached its culmination at last. A man under the influence of a divine madness had come to believe that the weight of his body and spirit could turn the balance of the loaded scales.

Evil would go down and goodness would rise, destruction would sink, and salvation mount. The meditations and resolutions that took form and shape during the waxing and waning of a single moon were momentous indeed. Surely matter was challenged. The mind of man, the spirit of man, had turned about and outfaced the enemy. A living, conscious glance had been directed upon a universe dark and torpid. Its very foundations were shaken 'by the breath of his lips.' A new hope had come to birth, impossible, beyond the range of reason.

There is a presumption, perhaps, in trying to trace the origin of Christ's brave and extravagant conviction. Its strength and power lay possibly in its fantastic and compassionate arrogance. Who can estimate or weigh or compute the fury of his divine mania? It does not brook comprehension. It had in it the wings of a kite, the leap of the cheetah, the swift, unpremeditated flash of cutting lightning. The sluggish manners of ordered nature were impotent against it. Not so, not so, O my God! was it ordained from the beginning. Proclaim it abroad throughout the chambers of nature – the presence of an heroic treason. None can withstand it, none can contend against it. In a single inspired moment the tough strings by which

existence is hung trembled in their suspension. Matter was attacked on her blind side; where least it was expected, there the blow fell. Without instruction a single man had projected a method of salvation. The sequel, the consummation of the burthen of Jesus, had brought to pass the idea of a single, sufficient, sacrificial ransom. It is probably to the fifty-third chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah that we must look, if we are to discover the seeds of Christ's unaccountable purpose. Evidently he had for a long time pondered upon this strange oracle. 'For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. . . . He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . He shall see of the travail of his soul,

and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.'

The preaching of John the Baptist ended as abruptly as it had begun. In his rough, rude way he had not hesitated to rebuke Herod Antipas for his marriage with Herodias; and the Tetrarch, fearful of the prophet's influence, had sent a squadron of soldiers to the river and carried him off to one of his dungeons. His action was a purely political one. In his secret soul this superstitious son of Herod the Great held John in as much awe as did his mule-driving, well-digging, olive-tree-beating subjects.

Jesus, upon John's arrest, moved northward into Galilee, that 'cradle of zealotism.' There, through the villages of the hill-country that was his own, he also began to call men to repentance and to preach that 'the days are fulfilled.' At first his success was as startling as that of his great fore-runner. The Galileans received him buxomly. An indescribable glamour enshrined those early days. In living, thumb-nail, Bewick-like sketches, Saint Peter presents to us a succession of early print-pictures of them. We are given hints of the simple

pride felt by the Twelve at the swift recognition that came to their leader by means of his authoritative manner, by means of his sharp, unexpected, astonishing words, by means of the power he had of meeting adequately every circumstance, by means of the quick conceits of his judgments, and by means of the wonders worked by his personal magnetism.

He was entirely unpredictable. To follow and wait and listen was in itself sufficient reward. Immortal sayings dropped like silver hail about the ears of those fresh-water fishermen. In the narrow, smelling alleys they heard them, under the cool shadows of crowded Eastern archways, out on the very water itself. Their Lord passed through the world as one anointed, dedicated to God. Everything seemed possible to him. He was the most dutiful of men, and at the same time the most revolutionary. Saint Peter was amazed by his humility, amazed by his pride, and always some indefinable grace and charm knit close and closer to his chosen master the fisherman's soul. It was a period of contradictions. At the very moment when triumph seemed assured, when all the population seemed ready to acclaim Jesus, he would suddenly disappear, and scorning the multitude, walk out of

the village or city, when all were sleeping, in order to pray by himself in some unfrequented desert place. Yet they were days of success also, miraculous days. All values were being transvalued. The new wine had to be put into new bottles. Saint Peter's master thought little of conventions. He insisted upon no punctilious piacular restrictions. Ecstatic visions were to be reached by no ascetic discipline. It would almost seem that the grave apostolic group was permitted upon occasions to forget religious preoccupations and indulge in a gaiety natural and human. We can hear them jesting, as they sat by the roadside under a vineyard wall, with their strong knees showing beneath their hand-spun robes, eating the salted carp-like fish that Jesus is said to have especially relished, with olives, and lumps of dry figs, and barley-bread. They certainly were indifferent as to the company they kept. The freedom of this young pharisaical rabbi who was no Pharisee became an offence to that strict puritan sect which judged that the greatest commandment of the law was 'the law of fringes.' 'How is it,' they asked, 'that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?' Jesus, as always, had his swift, ironic answer ready. 'They that are whole have no need of the physi-

cian, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'

Already he was a recognized teacher, and was permitted to expound his doctrines in the synagogue at Capernaum. Recent excavations have uncovered the stones of this very building, stones which for so many centuries have, through the ceaseless industry of blind, mud-eating earthworms, been sunk away out of sight. There they stand to-day, solidly set in position, those carved blocks, on the shore of a lake blue as Our Lady's kirtle. It was within this enclosure of stones, carved with pots of manna, with symbolic clusters of grapes, that Jesus once stood and preached. Here in this synagogue built by the Roman centurion ('He loveth our nation, and has built us *the* synagogue') Jesus 'snorted' in indignation at perceiving the hardness of the hearts of the people. Here he went in and out, fortified by his hidden trust. 'And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this?' 'He is a good man,' some said; 'Nay, but he deceiveth the people,' cried others.

But the more his fame was spread abroad, the more often did Jesus betake himself to the undis-

turbed places he loved, 'rising up a great while before dawn.' He was now so well known that his appearance in Capernaum at any hour would provoke universal interest; crowds collected, following him wherever he went. They brought out their sick to him. They stood about in wonder, waiting to watch what he would do, waiting to hear what he would say. 'What manner of man is this?' Few could withstand the influence of this Rab who had the truth in his heart. 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.' The very tax-collectors followed him, forgetful of their accounts and of their leather money-bags, left on dusty tables in their custom-house shanties. We never saw it on this fashion.'

It was observed that he did not teach, as the regular scribes and Pharisees, by Scriptural exposition. He taught always in parables, telling simple, realistic stories that everybody could understand, yet having in them some enigmatic seed of hidden meaning, which when he stopped speaking and moved away, haunted and provoked the minds of his listeners. A few words caught in those fly-pestered thoroughfares sufficed to trouble the spirits of the most casual bystanders, so that when they turned again to their daily occupations, to

their fishing, and their selling of cabbages, carrots, artichokes, and melons, their minds reverted continually to what they had heard. These sheep without a shepherd lifted up their heads from their worldly grazing. They had caught upon the wind an intonation, a whistling, that they recognized.

What then was the secret of the doctrine of this young and original teacher? Gradually, out of the ambiguity of his words, a definite faith took shape. Some great change was at hand – the Messiah was coming, was perhaps even then amongst them. The importunate, strident life of the ordinary world was in the sight of eternity nothing but vanity. The spirit beneath the form was what mattered. Men had been deceived. What they prized most was but vanishing dust. Reality lay elsewhere, 'outside the flaming ramparts of the world.' By giving up what they held most dear – their possessions, their ambitions – they could win to salvation. 'Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue,' let him forsake it. Let the dead bury the dead, let the living desert those they love. They must extricate themselves from all worldly ties and save their souls by renunciation, by sacrifice, by devotion. 'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.' The

moonlight on the waters, the sunshine on the gleaming grass, the gladness of the sight of hard corn-grains scattered and spread out upon the ground, the happiness of families at home in shadowed rooms, with chests and couches against the walls, fortunate unremembered days of labour on the hills, did not suffice for life; above everything it was necessary for each individual soul to be in perfect harmony with God. The prophets had foretold that such a moral awakening would come to pass, and the time was now at hand. Suffering, and cruelty, and injustice would be overcome. They would be overcome by the simple means of relieving the gross energy that created them of its attraction and force: 'For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.' There should be no compromise with the external world. It was the poor in pocket who would see God. 'As the partridge sitteth on eggs and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and his end shall be a fool.' The old, heady, sodden loaf of bread that constituted life upon earth must be leavened with an entirely new yeast.

In the light of the subsequent history of Christianity it is hard for our minds to envisage clearly

its root-teachings! but that Jesus taught us to divorce ourselves from all normal human interests cannot be doubted. Cæsar's realm was one thing, the realm of God another, and no reconciliation of these two was possible to the children of faith. The message was incompatible, and called out for modifications and compromises, and these, under the providence of God, have been given to it. Spiritual motives, Jesus insisted, must supersede worldly motives, but in the fulfilment of two thousand years, except in the case of a choice few, the victory has consistently been with the latter, and it is an evil, a cause of offence, and a great stumbling. As ants rush out to cover up any destruction that may happen to their catacombed, crumb-mould pavilions, so do the unconscious censors of the human heart rush out, what time the cloak of their content has received a gash. 'It is harder for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' During those early days in Galilee, Jesus made no open claim to be the Messiah. His faithful disciples were exhorted to follow him as a 'man of the sons of men,' and not as the 'son of God.' Upon occasions he would give hints of the existence of the burden he carried, but that was

all. 'For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

News of the stir that he was making in Capernaum eventually reached his home. His family heard conflicting rumours. It was reported that the fisher-folk of the lake-side declared boldly they had never listened to anyone who spoke like Jesus. 'God bless us, and grant us more of it!' But the official Jewish teachers from Jerusalem, so it was said, were offended. 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?' With sceptical hostility they pronounced that his power was derived from Satan. 'He casts out devils through the prince of devils,' was the explanation they gave. His mother Mary, and his two brothers, James and Joses, eventually decided to go down to the water of Gennesareth. The harp-shaped inland lake was about twenty miles from their home. They concluded that Jesus was 'beside himself'; and they wished to bring him back to the humdrum security of Nazareth and his old quiet occupations with gimlet and bradawl. On their arrival at Capernaum they found that Jesus was in a house surrounded by a multitude of people, and because

of this press they had to send messengers to him, asking him to come out to them. Thirty-five years later, the occasion was still fresh in Saint Peter's memory. He remembered exactly how, when the messengers spoke to him, Jesus had 'looked round about' on them which sat with him in the crowded room. There they were, the tax-gatherers, the pedlars, the harlots, and the hucksters, the reviled, the rejected, with their Oriental faces illumined by their desire to learn his secrets, the secret of death, the secret of life, and the secret of God. Never before had Jesus appreciated with a clearer certainty the high value of the free individual soul. He saw them there before him and he spoke out fearlessly his liberating anarchic word: 'Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.'

It may very well have been this untoward appearance of his mother and brethren in Capernaum that suggested to Jesus the idea of revisiting his birthplace. As they were apprehensive on his account, perhaps they would be reassured, as is the manner with provincial people, if they saw their immediate neighbours according him the same

respect and deference which just then was being so freely offered in the fishing-towns of the lake-side. In due time, therefore, he set out for 'his own country,' with his disciples following him, along the dusty highway that ran under the horns of Hattin and through the little village of Cana of Galilee.

At last he was there, back upon that high ridge of his natal home, with the mud-plastered houses like martins' nests clustering close to the steep brow of the hill. These uplands above Nazareth refresh the eyes, nay, the heart, with their wide, fair prospects. Beneath the balancing of clouds tinged with the red of evening, Carmel, like a couchant lion, stretches out its flanks into the plains to the eastward, while to the west, Mount Tabor, shaped like a haycock, falls into line with the distant slopes of Gilboa. From any point to the north of the village it is possible to look down on Mary's well, a centre of life that must have been common to Jesus from his earliest childhood. 'And from that well bare he water often-time to his mother. And in that well she washed often-time the clouts of her son Jesu Christ.' Beyond the well lies the threshing-floor, a level place where weary camels can kneel and be relieved of the dead weights

they have carried. There he saw it, Nazareth in Galilee of the Gentiles, a village full of charm and grace in the daytime, and at night, under the ordinances of the moon, taking to itself a transparent, shell-like quality, entirely unique, entirely peculiar to itself. Who knew it if not he? – the old people and the young people of his acquaintance, the animals, the patient asses, the black bawdy goats, the lop-eared sheep, the very scavenger dogs! Everything in those narrow streets he recognized, the place of the broken-down wall where, over crumbling stones and dry clay, he had clambered as a boy to snatch the fruit from fig or pomegranate tree; he knew it, he knew it all, the weeds in the wall-crannies, the pots on the oven! A hundred times he had followed his father up that steep way, carrying the instruments of their trade, his head full of thoughts and visions. There in the sun-shadowed street he had once seen a dead dog, with teeth 'sharp and white as pearls'; and there was the spot by the well-overflow where, as a child, with his playmate Zeno, he had made sparrows out of mud. It is indeed curious to remember that Jesus should have known the visible world as we know it, should have looked with accustomed eyes upon the leaves of the vine, upon the large leaves of the

mulberry, so crisp and dry in the autumn, upon the lilies of the field, upon all the flowers 'of unchangeable colour,' and upon the little purple crocuses even, in Somerset called naked-nannies.

There is a kind of honour in this, common to us all, a kind of privilege in being able to exercise our senses upon objects once known to him: to look at the constellations, for example, rising into their places, and to know that his eyes also have counted the seven stars, to look at the flat, uncloven shape of a camel's foot-mark in soft mud, and to know that these round indentures, because of their familiarity, would have raised no questioning comment in his mind. Wind and rain, shadow and sunshine, ice 'like morsels,' and white frost 'like ashes,' he knew them all, the mystery of red fire that cannot be weighed, the mystery of living water so pure, so cool, so transparent. If he revisited the earth, the fifteen hills that surrounded his native home would look still the same. That Merlin's-circle, so blessed by man on account of his birth, would appear to him unchanged. I have laid my hands on a thousand native hillside stones that are to-day exactly as they were when Christ was alive, each crinkled crevice in place and unchipped. Here was a good man and one who did good things.

He ate bread as we eat bread, tasting the sweet corn in its substance; he drank wine as we drink wine, tasting the fruit of the grapes. We can follow the very paths that his mind took as he read Isaiah or Jeremiah or Micah. The story of King David's exploits, that we learned from round, childish, Phœnician lettering, printed black upon white pages, his imagination also has considered. Daring and gentle, dangerous and full of love more than any man, who is able to audit him? From the heart, perhaps, an atheist may gain an apprenticeship in what, to the intellect, is beyond the range of understanding. How strange to think that while this man lived here, that side of the moon which never has been seen by mortal eyes was carried regularly across the heavens month by month! Babylonian magi might have stolen from that lunar space-confronting surface a trowel full of moon-dust to mingle with earth-dust, might have spilled the two substances at the feet of Jesus, the treacherous soil and the sane soil, the redeemed and the unredeemed. Did the other side of the moon know aught of Jesus, of this man who so deliberately, with so dedicated an impulse, threw himself alive into the yawning jaws of Moloch? Does the sun, the eternal life-giving sun, wot of him to-day, or the high

midnight stars, so remote, so still, so frozen in unimplicated infinitude?

On the Sabbath, Jesus entered the synagogue the foundations of which are still visible, the very synagogue where, as the older historians tell us, he had first learnt his A-B-C's. The master of the synagogue gave into his hands the scroll of the prophet Isaiah; and Jesus turned the book over, until he came to the passage which reads: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.' And when he had finished, he gave the book back to the ruler and began to speak. At first the people were impressed by 'the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth.' Jesus assured them he was well aware that they expected him to do in Nazareth works as wonderful as those which he had done in Capernaum. Unless he satisfied them, they would be soon reminding him of the proverb, 'Physician, heal thyself.' In truth, already there was a certain murmuring amongst them. Did they not know Jesus as well as he knew them – Jesus the carpen-

ter, the eldest son of Joseph the carpenter, who had been dead several years? Was he not the brother of James 'the righteous,' whose knees, hard-worn from constant praying, had callosities upon them like a camel's – the brother of Joses, and of Juda, and Simon, the brother of the two women who, 'cumbered with much serving,' daily carried water upon their heads through the streets to the doors of their husbands' houses? Jesus caught their tone and realized that his journey to Nazareth had been a failure. Yet something made him press on. Recognition of his power, belief in his power, he was always tender about that. His mind rushed to his memories of the prophets, those proud, inspired men, his true peers.

Twenty miles away, on that Sabbath morning, almost within sight of the synagogue door, could be seen Mount Carmel, the favourite haunt of Elijah and Elisha, while nearer still, to the northward, was the burying-place of the prophet Jonah. Had these men in their day done all their great works in their homes, in their native lands? 'But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them

was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. . . . Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. . . . A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.' The brilliance of the thrust that his knowledge of the Scriptures had put into his head, and the absolute truth of his reproach, proved too much for the temper of the good citizens. 'And he was a cause of offence to them.' These smiths, wood-sawyers, and small householders rose from their seats and were minded to throw him from the cliff of precipitation, down into the plain of Esdraelon. The man could work no miracles amongst them. All the rumours they had heard were false rumours. He was, after all, but a raw, illiterate workman, 'a carpenter and son of a carpenter.' He might, perhaps, be relied upon to select a good elbow-shaped piece of wood for the central pivot-beam of a plough, but for nothing else.

The remarkable gifts possessed by Jesus for the recovering of the sick, and for the soothing of mad-

men, and for the quieting of those suffering from every form of nervous disorder, were ineffective at Nazareth 'because of their unbelief.' He left the beautiful unimaginative village, never to return. Back to the lake he went, back to that incomparable stretch of water, with its hollow ribbed boats, and sun-still valleys, and high overshadowing hills. It was a freer, happier environment. He had become acquainted with every aspect of it. He knew how the wicked lights of the city of Tiberias cast at night-time their luminous heathen shafts upon the dim, fish-filled waters; he knew how the lake's surface on calm days would shiver with a thousand circular concave ripples, like the tiny metal plates on a centurion's armour; he knew the green places near the entrance of the Jordan, the spiral white shells on the shore there, the flourishing fennel-plants, the oleanders! By the lake-side, escape was easy, escape from the crowds, escape from applause. At any moment he could take his place in one of the fishing-smacks and be carried across to the solitary, unfrequented glens he loved. Walking and meditating and praying on those high eastern slopes, he would be able sometimes to distinguish the boats of his faithful disciples from the others on the water, would see them there beneath him in

their diminutive buoyant crafts, 'toiling in rowing,' while he was still 'alone on the land.'

Very patiently he gave his disciples instruction in his doctrine, expounding all things unto them when they were alone. 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation . . . the kingdom of God is within you.' He likened it to a seed cast into the ground, which springs up without the notice or knowledge of the sower. He sleeps, he eats, he occupies himself with secular tasks, and it continues to grow. There is a convincing simplicity, a startling sureness about all his sayings. They fly from him with the directness of feathered arrows. They glide straight to the mark without the help of art, and where they strike they stick. Some quite chance occasion often provokes them, and the delusive obvious, the delusive ordinary, the delusive commonplace, is pierced to its core. A remnant of these scattered utterances have had power in them to alter the course of human destiny. They are agrarian, pastoral, poetic, yet pregnant with the mysteries. The style of Jesus is unique, the temper of his mood inevitable as the unexplained marvel of his person. Every word he speaks reveals the same exceptional twist, at once realistic and sublime. His intellect never betrays him, his

insights never err. By their childlike, mysterious unexpectedness, now above, now below, now passing sideways, his words offer earth's troth to Heaven. It is impossible to corner him: to his genius there remains always some oblique passage of escape. The fortunate and blessed are not the prosperous and well-constituted, but the meek, the peace-makers, the pure in heart. It is not necessary to lie with a woman to commit adultery, the sweet, perilous thought is in itself sufficient. It is forbidden to war against one's enemies. 'Whoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.' A man should be wholly concerned with spiritual values. It is folly for him to cajole and besot himself with the treasures of the earth, where 'moth and rust doth corrupt.' 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' It is not enough to cry 'Lord, Lord!' Rather let a man do the will of his father in heaven. Let him take no thought for his own material well-being. 'Consider the lilies of the field.' Then, when we imagine we are near to understanding, suddenly he speaks from a new angle. The disciples must be as harmless as doves, and 'as wise as serpents'; they must make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. 'The foxes

have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head.' How those proud, sad, outlawed words still linger and linger over the stony wild places of Palestine.

Soon after his departure from Nazareth, Jesus called the Twelve to him and sent them away to preach the Gospel in the neighbouring villages. He ordered them to take nothing with them but a stout staff to help them on their wayfaring. They were allowed nothing else, no scrip, no bread, no money tied up in knotted rags. If they were rejected in any village, they were to shake off the dust from their sandals for testimony against it. 'Verily, I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.' We catch in this an unmistakable hint of that other side of Christ's nature. Here is the wilful, passionate, headstrong utterance of a man of mettle. This is not 'the wrath' of any 'lamb,' but the expression of a fiery spirit, void of tolerance or pity. Here is no soft, mild Jesus, but one who could strike and strike again, a man who would have his own way or none. 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' It is in these very contradictions that his strength lies. If ever the 'inert malice' abroad in the world is to be subdued, our

arsenal must be equipped with a different weapon for each base head. Our enemies, these inhibited, illiberal devotees of dead values, are not easily to be come at. They for ever shift ground, disguising themselves in white, like stoats in winter.

It seems that the Twelve were by no means unsuccessful on their missionary expedition. They preached that men should repent, they brought calm to the souls of the distraught, and 'anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.' Every day the name of Jesus spread further and further abroad, spread so far, at last, that it reached to the ears of Herod Antipas. Ever since that banquet of lust and wine, when, in the presence of 'his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee,' he had caused the head of John the Baptist to be brought in to him on a rush-woven platter, the easy-going Tetrarch had never felt at peace in his conscience. Well he recognized his presumption in having silenced God's terrible messenger. But had he silenced him for ever? That was the question. As soon as he heard rumours of this new prophet, he suspected that John had risen from the dead. No one knew better than he that a man could build a golden house half-way up a hill, a golden house adorned with

sculptured architraves, could order about his servants, could be 'gorgeously apparelled and live delicately,' and yet not be secure. Life was full of perfidy. Below the objective world that a man could master lay a sinister subsurface. Had not this knowledge been impressed upon him in his youth? Had not he been brought up in the palaces of his father, where, like November starlings, the ghosts of the dead gathered in throngs about the old king, depriving him of blissful sleep? His garrulous courtiers declared the new prophet to be Elijah; but Antipas thought otherwise. In horror he uttered the words: 'It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead.' It seems that on this occasion the Pharisees did Jesus a service by warning him of his danger at the hands of Herod. 'Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee.' It was a timely word. Christ had no wish to be ensnared by the authorities in Galilee. The Holy City, Jerusalem, was to be his altar of sacrifice, and he sent a message to Herod, saying as much. 'Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless, I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out

of Jerusalem.' It is not recorded whether the message ever reached its destination, whether it was ever carried up the proud hillside where the great ones of the earth lorded it over Chuza, the steward, and the rest of the serving-men. Herod's curiosity about Jesus was, however, destined to be satisfied. In God's good time the two 'kings of the Jews' were to meet face to face. At present Jesus felt it expedient to leave the province. The appropriate setting for 'his hour' must at all costs be assured. He must meet his death, not in the city of this circumcised pagan, built, as it was muttered, over the bones of dead Jews, but in the city of his true king, in the city of David. He arose, therefore, and 'went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon.'

Although Jesus had spoken to the Pharisees with such proud foreknowledge of his end, it can hardly be doubted that his departure northward marked for him a period of great mental and spiritual depression. He was probably for several weeks entirely by himself, and his proximity to this alien greater sea, and to the famous twin cities, with their foreign manners and customs, must have added to his sense of isolation. What could this hard world, with its infinite ramifications, have to

do with his own private Jewish idealism, that world so cultured, so cynical, and so engrossed? We are told that he 'entered into a house.' Of the landlord, once alive and vigorous, and fulfilling *his* hour, we know nothing. Even alone and in retirement Jesus could not be hidden. The Syro-Phœnician woman found him, and in spite of the harsh reception she got – 'it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it unto the dogs' – her quick wit, so much in Christ's own style, won for her its reward. He seems soon afterwards to have been joined by his disciples; and together he and this small band of men, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, made their way round the northern end of the Tetrarch's jurisdiction, to the 'coasts of Decapolis.' Here the maniac who called himself Legion had already blazed abroad his name, and the populace pressed about him with their sick and infirm. They brought to him a man with an impediment in his speech, and Jesus, taking him aside from the multitude, put his fingers into his ears, and spat and touched his tongue, so that the string of his tongue was loosed 'and he spake plain.' From Decapolis he came once more into Galilee; but he dared not teach in his old free manner. Things were different now. His popularity was no

longer so great, and the Pharisees were ever at the heels of his sandals, saying that he was a Samaritan, accusing him of 'deceiving the people,' and pestering him to prove his claim by a sign from heaven. 'Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily, I say unto you, There shall be no sign given unto this generation.'

A dullness, a fatal 'slowness of heart,' lay upon his disciples also. 'Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? . . . And he said unto them, How is that ye do not understand?' These words were spoken when they were on the water, rowing from a little place south of Capernaum to Bethsaida Julia, a new Hellenistic village to the east of where the Jordan flows into the lake. Their utterance probably marks the most dispirited and unredeemed moment of his life. 'Jesus watched the uncomprehending faces and felt lonely at heart.' The importunity of the Pharisees had caused him to 'sigh deeply,' and now once again his soul had of necessity to groan. At Bethsaida he brought back sight to a blind man. He led him out of the Jewish quarter of the town; and there, amongst nettles and heaps of broken potsherds, where all was quiet, he spat and made clay, and with this primitive salve anointed the two sick eyes.

And under the influence of that divine spittle, more effective than the gall of any fish, the cataract 'pilled away,' until the sufferer declared he could see men 'as trees walking.'

From Bethsaida he set out with his disciples for Cæsarea Philippi. Whether he and his disciples entered the city itself is uncertain. It possessed a privileged site. It was built on the slopes of Mount Hermon, around the grot out of which, through basalt crevices, burst forth the infant waters of the Jordan. Up from the earth it bursts, the cool, ignorant, living water, to-day and from the first, unaware of its destiny. A crack, a great rift, fractured the planet's crust, and who could have foretold its consequence? In those sunken unseen shafts, 'not so very far down under ground,' there was no knowledge of the future of these welling waters, no mind to know, no mind to foresee, the power of this stream when once it reached earth's porous and shaken surface. Not only have herons, with slow, wavering flight, consecrated its pools, not only have its moving currents reflected the shadows of swallows and of straight-flying rock-pigeons, but the imagination of man, of man upright in body, perverse in nature, has had its dwelling there. The natural phenomenon of one

of the smallest sublunary rivers was chosen to be the symbol of hope, deep as its own deep beds. Not the Nile, not the Rhine, not the Stour, or the Yeo, has had so wild an influence on men's thoughts. Who could have conceived the manner of the welcome these waters would receive when they emerged at last from their age-long darkness into the light of the sun? At the time of Our Lord, the Greeks had built a shrine to the god Pan at their source, a shrine enlarged by Herod the Great into a temple. To-day the words 'Priest of Pan' are still to be seen graven on the stone of the grotto. Here it was that the heathen indulged in their 'vain babblings,' hoping to be heard by their much speaking. It is possible that Jesus himself visited this celebrated fountain and with estranged eyes contemplated the sanctuary of this false deity so alien to the temper of his mind. He, the son of God, of Yahweh, transformed now into a benevolent being whose thought and care extended to the very sparrows sold for a farthing, confronted that other sovereign deity of tender, perishing flesh. Did they actually confront each other, those two incompatible influences, the soul of the all-pervading spirit, and the symbol of manifest physical beauty – the soul of the wind in the trees, and the still Naiad

echo? Nothing matters, everything matters. A cry has gone up in the sunshine, in the mystery of the twilight, in the mystery of the darkness of night. Here, where troops of phantoms walk over lucky grass under a concave eminent sky, with startling scarlet blood in their veins, the secret, the ultimate word, has yet to be spoken. Rustling dew-damp foliage about us, dog-mercury under our feet, and a thousand whisperings upon the laden air – the right path, the correct, unequivocal way to walk, who can be sure of it, who can have knowledge of it? This tiny, abbreviated stream of silver water, existent in the actual space of a vast material abyss, the sun an inconceivable mass of flaming matter, itself but a torch in an inconceivable infinity, and between star and river the pathetic, eager thoughts of man so easily assuaged, so easily misled!

The spirit of Jesus, as he walked toward the pagan city, was very heavy. Dejection and disappointment dogged the free movement of his soul. None had believed, none had even understood his proud, impassioned illusion. Behind him trod his earth-bound disciples, simple and uneducated men, men more fitted for dragging boats over noisy seashore shingle than for discerning difficult secrets.

In utter loneliness his Hebrew mind brooded upon its inner vision. Yet, as it reverted, and again reverted, to his impassioned idea, he was prompted at last to seek relief for his heart's trouble in spoken words. He fell to questioning his faithful followers as to the world's opinion of him. The melancholy silence of their journey was at last broken. 'Whom do men say that I am?' came the audible human question. The doltish disciples answered him – some men say you are Elijah, and some men say you are John the Baptist, and some say you are 'one of the prophets.' It was as he had expected, not a man of them understood. Recklessly he put the question in a more direct form: 'But whom say ye that I am?' There was a pause; and then, as they advanced along the surface of that dusty road, bordered with silver-burnished dead thistles, and sprinkled over with infinitesimal fragments of gravel, and with odd-shaped balls of camel's dung, the suspense was ended. It was the voice of Saint Peter speaking, the voice of Simon, rough and ready, sounding in his ears. 'And Peter answereth and saith unto him, THOU ART THE CHRIST.'

In unforgettable historical words Jesus showed his gratitude. 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,

but my Father which is in heaven.' But even now Simon, who was then for the first time named Peter, was far from understanding the plan by which Christ's belief was to be revealed to the world. He was not, as his master, learned in the Scriptures, and even the Scriptures rumbled with prophecies capable of endless interpretations. The word 'Christ' meant for Saint Peter in a very immediate sense triumph, deliverance, victory. So when Jesus, encouraged by the confession of faith, began to explain that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer at Jerusalem, to be even afflicted unto death, the stout, loyal heart of Saint Peter felt bewildered and offended. Vehemently his whole nature reluctated against this insane purpose, now grasped by him for the first time. How could the punishment and death of Jesus so benefit the world? Let some other present himself as the scapegoat for the race, for the hungry generations. 'A curse of God,' is he that is hanged. He took Jesus aside, therefore, and began to reason with him, 'nay, to rebuke' him, saying, 'Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.' Jesus had believed from the first that the sufferings of the Messiah were to be his personal lot; thoughts of this kind since the days of his solitary communing in the mountain

Quarantal had made up the ecstatic sublevels of his life-illusion. The pride of his being had been built about this conception of himself, and any backsliding now would have meant death to his soul. Saint Peter's words seemed to tempt him toward such a disaster; and he turned on his favourite disciple and said: 'Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.' They were strong words, and words that were remembered by Simon till the day of his death, remembered and recorded against himself by this honest, humble man. Jesus now explained to his disciples that they also would have to suffer. 'Think not I came to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword!' He reminded them of the tenure of his former teaching. If they believed in him they must be prepared to sacrifice everything. 'For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' The little band was few and weak, but Christ's inspiration was strong enough, and they were borne along on the wings of his own indomitable confidence. 'Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till

they see the son of man coming in his kingdom' – words that were steadfastly believed until the death of the very last of them proved that they were not true.

Seven days passed, and Jesus, taking with him Peter and James and John, went up to the top of Mount Hermon. In some solitary glacial valley of that high place, where fields of immaculate snow gleam and glitter, they had a vision. There appeared unto them Moses and Elijah, and they were talking with Jesus. There they were, the majestic lawgiver, the not less majestic prophet, resplendently visible upon 'the mountain of the leopards.' The disciples were 'sore afraid.' Saint Peter, wishing perhaps to placate by a reviving of old memories the most formidable of the apparitions, proposed that they should make 'three tabernacles,' three booths. 'For he wist not what to say.' However we may interpret this experience, it is evident that something very extraordinary took place. We are told that a voice came out of the sky, saying, 'This is my beloved son: hear him,' and we know that the raiment of Jesus, the long Eastern robe and the sacred seamless tunic, became as shining as the furrowed snow, 'so as no fuller on earth can white them.' It was over,

Suddenly, when they had looked round about, 'they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.' Down they came from the mountain, down over the shell-rock, down through the cedars, down through the scrub and bush. 'The north and the south, thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.' Jesus counselled them to speak to no one of what they had seen. The hour had not yet come for his Messiahship to be publicly proclaimed; however, he 'steadfastly set his face' to go up to Jerusalem.

They travelled south by slow stages. They revisited Galilee, actually venturing to enter Capernaum, and from there, crossing over to the eastern bank of the Jordan, slowly made their way to Jericho. The Twelve were excited. The anticipation of so soon entering into the Holy City caused them to fear, and caused them to exult. They had been told that when their master would sit on his 'throne of glory,' they also would sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Like so many Sancho Panzas this prospect pleased them well. Trailing along behind Jesus, they would often beguile the length of the road with such apocalyptic eschatological talk. They

shrewdly suspected, however, that discourses of this kind would hardly tally with the tense, preoccupied mood of their master; and they were not a little taken aback one day, when, upon their arrival at the end of their journey, he suddenly turned to them with the question, 'What was it ye disputed among yourselves by the way?' But they held their peace; for by the way they had disputed among themselves 'who should be the greatest.' And straightway Jesus gave them a lesson, in his own patient and inimitable fashion. He called them to him, and took in his arms a little child and said: 'Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. . . . If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.'

Already the spring was come; and as the small troop looked upon the green hillsides around them, and saw the people gathering everywhere like migratory birds, to go up to Jerusalem for the paschal festival, they trembled with mysterious expectations of great things. Indeed, the whole spiritual atmosphere of the Promised Land was strained by a waiting, by a great suspense. The meanest Jew, carrying his water-skin by its pizzle,

felt in his blood, in the hair of his head, in his notched spine, that his land was upon the eve of some great happening. The rich young man came running and threw himself down before Jesus. 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' He got his answer, that answer which for two thousand years has sent the commentators to their ink-horns. The disciples also were astonished, saying among themselves, 'Who then can be saved?' And Peter's mind once again began to be occupied with rewards. 'Lo, we have left all and have followed thee.' This time, Jesus, it seems, heard his simple Simon's words not without amusement, and gave him an answer half-serious and half-ironic. As they drew on towards Jerusalem, the disciples became ever more and more afraid. What would happen to them in the great city, to plain countrymen from Galilee, speaking their broad speech and following their own rough customs? For Judas alone came from Judea, from a little village called Kerioth. 'They were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid.' Jesus, walking before them under divine compulsion, 'a prince among his brethren,' gave them little reassurance. 'Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered

unto the chief priest, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death.'

Led by the unfaltering steps of Jesus, they left Jericho behind them. 'For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.' Now, if ever, might the balsam trees in the pleached gardens of Jericho 'drop sap, like tears.' It was the last section of their journey. The long, wild, winding road to Jerulsalem lay before them. They passed the wayside inn of the good Samaritan and the dark ravine where, fifty years before, Herod the Great had been minded to murder Cleopatra, as he conducted her with her innumerable cuttings and slips for planting in her garden in Heliopolis, wayward and lovely as always, on her road to Pelusium, the frontier-town of her Egyptian kingdom. To the right and to the left, the robber-haunts were bright with flowers. Everywhere the grass was soft and unhandseled. They would soon be facing the proud priests of the temple; and an omen had not been lacking. Already, out of the crowd at Jericho, a voice had hailed Jesus by the traditional title belonging to the Messiah. When they were approaching Bethany, a village on the eastern

slopes of the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples forward to fetch an ass. It would be found, so he declared, tethered to a post where two ways met.

'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: Behold thy King cometh unto thee: He is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass: and upon a colt the foal of an ass.' The heart of Jesus laid great store by this prediction; and for many generations it has carried weight with men. To our vulgar modern minds the symbolism of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem after this exact fashion has lost something of its original persuasion. That he should have elected to appear at the gates of the city, not upon a white camel, not upon a white mule, but upon a peaceful donkey, seems a matter of no great consequence. It was not so in the old days. This small, patient, and enduring animal, with long, twitching ears and docile eyes, was foreordained from the beginning to carry Christ to his death. Its delicate, careful feet rustled now over the crisp palm-leaves with which the eager populace had strawed the way. The claim that had been made in so innocent a manner was not lost upon his followers. 'Hosanna!' they shouted; 'Hosanna! Blessed is

he that cometh in the name of the Lord.' The pariah dogs, resting their starved rib-bones amongst the dry graves of dead Jews, stood up to gaze a moment at that pathetic demonstration. The little olive birds with a dot of scarlet on their heads flitted out of its way, to settle upon the twigs of trees higher up on the hill; and all the time the broad Oriental sunshine fell with uninterrupted light upon the eager, uplifted faces of the hurrying crowd. 'Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.'

Many months, and perhaps years, had passed since Jesus had last looked upon Jerusalem; and when he came to that spot on the road where the city first breaks upon the eyes of the traveller, he was deeply moved. There he saw it, the ancient city, the glory of his ancestors. There he saw it, that tragic, indescribable eminence, with its temple glistering white as hail, white as hoar-frost, with its double colonnades, with its walls and flat sunny roofs, with its battlements and towers banked higher and ever higher against the sky. It was an exultant spectacle; but even as he looked at it, the shadow of Jerusalem's future fell upon him in prophetic vision. We are told that when he

beheld the city he wept over it. 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing and ye would not!' Did he, is it possible that he at that moment foresaw the long years of the burden of Jerusalem, foresaw siege after siege pour its desolation over those consecrated stones, envisaged the long-drawn-out sorrow, the protracted doom, of the Jewish capital? Did he actually glimpse the legions of Titus gathered about it, like griffin vultures about the corpse of a milk-white zebra – the legions of Hadrian? Did he hear the ribald chanting of the Saracens, as they marched round on the top of the walls, beating the true cross, *his* cross, with thongs of camel-hide? 'Look well, O Franks, it is the true cross that we beat. It is the true cross that we beat.' Did he see the Crusaders at last making free with the city, and in his name wading up to 'the rock of white colour and a little meddled with red,' which marked his place of burial, knee-deep in human blood? 'Such a slaughter of pagan folk has never been seen nor heard of; none knows the number save God alone.'

On they went, these gay Galileans; and as they entered the gates, a ripple of interest passed through the city, always alert at this feast-time for portents, for miracles, for manifestations. 'And when he was come into Jerusalem all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.' The interest of the populace was aroused. Perhaps the arrival in Jerusalem of this provincial prophet of whom they had heard so much, might presage great things. Under the rude domination of the Romans, from the greatest to the least, each Jewish heart was eager and expectant for fulfilments. A murmuring, a muttering of deep matters, was carried upon the very air they breathed. 'Then said I unto the angel, What young person is it that crowneth them, and giveth them palms in their hands? So he answered, and said unto me, It is the Son of God, whom they have confessed in the world. Then began I greatly to commend them that stood so stiffly for the name of the Lord.'

Like the devout Jew that he was, the first preoccupation of Jesus upon entering Jerusalem was to visit the temple. 'He who dwelleth in this house grant thee comfort.' It is still possible to

touch and to see dumb stones that were in their place at the time of that far-off Passover. The enormous recumbent blocks that support the temple walls at the Jews' wailing-place remain as stationary witnesses of that afternoon. Did their grey surfaces, upon which we look so wistfully to-day, feel through their very atoms a trembling, a shivering, a supernatural reciprocity, as the feet of the conqueror of 'the worm that flies by night' passed above the echoing hollows of the substructure of the temple? 'For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.' Jesus mixed with the crowd in the open courts. He observed that the procedure in preparation for the feast had lost its ancient decorum. The sanctified precincts were being desecrated by sutlers and salesmen. The drovers had no longer been content to confine their sacrificial animals in their traditional quarters. Barterers also, and money-changers, had edged themselves nearer and nearer towards the sacred inner building. The noise, the clatter, the hum of a disobedient and vigorous life, accorded ill with the mood of Jesus, whose heart was pulsating with religious emotions, deep, mystical, and intolerant. He had come up to the temple to

pray, and behold, he had found it a market! He recalled the words of Jeremiah the prophet, 'Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?' Very different was it with his disciples. These honest homespuns had, it seemed, been greatly impressed during their first hours in the historic city. The glory of 'Herod's building' seemed to them to rival, if not to surpass, what had been the glory of the temple of Solomon. They moved about through the Huldah Gate, adorned with carvings of the symbolic vine of Judah, along under the snow-white columns of Solomon's porch, through the cloisters, through the court of the Gentiles, through the court of the Women, through the court of Israel, in open-eyed wonder. The story of their nation seemed to have won to a splendid objective reality in these ostentatious cloisters. 'When the eventide had come,' they went in search of Jesus, 'for to show him the buildings of the temple'; and there they found him in the crowd, physically present, the refined familiar figure in the fading daffodil-light, but in spirit and mood utterly withdrawn. However, one of them ventured to say: 'Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here.' And Jesus said unto

them: 'Seest thou these great buildings? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'

Jesus and his disciples left the city in the dark. The paving-stones they trod over had been grooved by the Romans to prevent their horses slipping. On each side of the way gaped vaulted apertures like so many prophets' caves, rough storing-places for merchandise, for country produce. They made their way to the eastern gate, and, leaving the city's midden-tainted air, returned to Bethany. There that blessed state of partial unconsciousness which men call sleep took under her protection those grave apostolic heads, stilling their anxious thoughts, replacing excitement by tranquillity, and disaffection by peace. The thirteen men slept; and without, upon the Mount of Olives, each blade of gentle grass swayed imperceptibly and silently in the night air.

Jesus had resolved to cleanse the temple. As it had been the day before, he found the strident life of commerce at ease within the gates of the holy enclosure. He violently assaulted it. He suddenly appeared with a whip of cord in his hand

and effected his purpose. Except in the case of the money-changers, whose tables he overturned, his flashing eyes and floating hair sufficed. 'Out you go, said the satyr,' and out they went, the fat-tailed sheep pushing up against each other in their fright, the bulls without blemish, the bullocks, the red heifers, slithering and jostling, their bovine spirits suddenly roused by so unexpected and untoward a herding. In that wild stampede the protests of the drovers with their staves and dusty heels availed little. Out they all had to go. The clamour of the foreign money-exchangers, with their carefully-arranged piles of the temple half-shekel, with their counterfeit coins and their counterfeit manners, had small attention given it. There they were, scrabbling in the dust of the paved hallway, like the man in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, never lifting their heads. Jesus was more civil to the sellers of pigeons. He went up to them and asked them to remove their cages stained with white dung and soiled feathers. And they, seeing well which way the cat was jumping, paid attention to his request. Jesus, that morning, following the strict tradition of the elders, forbade that the outer court should be used as a thoroughfare. 'He would not suffer that any man should

carry any vessel through the temple.' It is extraordinary that the motley assembly submitted to such drastic correction. The explanation lies in the fact that these abuses had sprung up during the worldly supervision of the Sadducees, and had been for a long time an offence to the more devout worshippers, who at this juncture gave their moral support to the frenzied prophet from Galilee so obviously with the fear of God in him. Probably even the Pharisees in their hearts approved of what had been done. That it had been effected by this officious impostor, and not by one of themselves, was what they resented. That day the appointed authorities of the temple did not dare to exert their power. They recognized that Christ's action was popular and that it had behind it the support of the multitude. Perhaps, when the evening came, and the crowds had dispersed, they might be able to do something; but at present they were afraid of provoking a riot, an uproar, amongst the pilgrims. When night fell, however, they discovered that Jesus had again left the city.

The cleansing of the temple has fascinated the imagination of the artists of all countries. On the famous El Greco canvas, and in a thousand other pictures, we see the drama reproduced. It

represents the victory of spirit over the gross strength of vested interests. It was a singular triumph. The ejected animals were quiet again now in their hurdled enclosures below the Corban Gate, having in their dull heads no knowledge of the fate that had selected them above all other cattle for so memorable an adventure.

At Bethany, also, strangely significant scenes were taking place. Wherever Jesus was it was so. He was entertained there by a man called Simon; and during the repast a certain woman appeared in the room, in 'garments of gladness,' who, breaking a cruse of precious spikenard, began to wash Christ's feet, drying them with the threads of her long and beautiful hair. This golden creature was a harlot; and Christ's host observed the scene with interest, curious to see whether his guest would recognize this well-attested fact. Jesus divined his thoughts. 'Simon, I have something to say unto thee.' And he said, 'Master, say on.' And there in that crowded room Jesus pronounced the sin of the woman forgiven. 'For she loved much.' And further, he said of this wayward 'daughter of Abraham,' who in her devotion and penitence had never ceased from crying and kissing his feet: 'Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever the gospel

shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.'

The parallel story of the woman taken in adultery, how its chaste loveliness searches the heart! What were the actual figures that his finger made on the ground, as he stooped down, 'as though he heard them not,' and wrote out his judgment in the symbolic dust? Were they shapes of trees, of boats with masts, or just noughts and crosses, or pot-hooks exactly reproduced a thousand times since by thoughtless happy, seaside children? When Jesus had lifted up himself and saw none but the woman, he said unto her: 'Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee!'

Only very occasionally is the fair unity of the legend rudely broken by some obstinate unrelated circumstance demanding a gloss. What, for example, can be made of the story of the cursing of the fig tree? This innocent tree, knowing by a tenderness in her branches that summer was near, had followed the law of her nature in 'putting forth leaves.' It happened that Jesus on one of his morning walks to the temple marked her forward

growth from 'afar off,' and, feeling hungry, walked over to her. Many a man since the beginning of the world has approached fruit-bearing trees with a similar expectancy, only to have his hopes frustrated. But without reason Jesus felt a grudge rise in his heart against this humble piece of vegetation, with its smooth, grey, sprawling boughs; and although he must have known that the season was yet early, even for the first preliminary figs, his disciples were astonished to hear him solemnly curse the fig tree. 'No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.' The shock of the malediction upon the sensitive air-breathing surface caused the sap to be withdrawn from each tremulous veined leaf, so that the next morning, when they passed by the same way, Saint Peter was amazed to see that the tree actually had withered. But even so Jesus experienced no pity, no shame for what he had done, 'no sigh for the folly of an irrevocable word,' but merely converted the incident into an occasion for delivering a homily upon the power of faith. 'Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.' Fortu-

nately this power has not been transmitted to the Church militant.

The day after the cleansing of the courts, Jesus arrived early at the temple, perhaps in time to hear the priests blow their threefold blasts for the punctual burnt-offering sacrifice of the lamb at dawn. Possibly it was at this early hour, before the crowds had collected, that Jesus observed those two incidents of ordinary life offering themselves so aptly as illustrations for his teaching. He was always alert to see what was going on in the common workaday world, and was fond of extracting lessons from accidental happenings. A Pharisee, 'bending like a branch and lifting himself up like a serpent,' was saying his prayers. 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers. . . . I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.' Also, not far away, there stood a publican, who 'would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.' Christ observed the two men in silence, and then, turning to his followers, he said: 'I tell you, this man will go down to his house justified rather than the other.'

'As a lion is narrow behind, but broad in front,

so the temple was narrow behind, but broad in front.' Jesus now seated himself before it, in the court of the Women, 'over against the treasury.' With the morning sunshine lying broadly upon its huge doors, he watched the people casting money into the box; and 'many that were rich cast in much.' Then there came a certain poor widow, 'and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.' Poverty always aroused Christ's sympathy. A tenderness towards the exploited and down-trodden was part of his nature; and as the small coins tinkled to rest, he again called to his disciples, and indicating the woman's retreating figure, said: 'Verily, this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.'

His meditations were now rudely interrupted, for his presence had been noticed, and he was surrounded by a deputation from the Sanhedrin, come to question him about his riotous action of the day before. They asked by what authority he had dared to do the things he had done. Jesus gave them no direct answer, but with his mind full of his Messianic claim questioned them about the

authenticity of the message of John the Baptist, who had 'prepared the way before him.' If they would answer his question, he would answer theirs. It was a most clever makeshift, and the Jews were not slow to catch its drift. If they confessed that John's baptism was 'from heaven,' then Jesus, they knew, would ask them why they had not believed in him; whereas if they said 'of men,' they would lose popularity with the bystanders, 'for all men counted John that he was a prophet indeed.' They were in a fine dilemma, and eventually had to acknowledge that they could not tell. And Jesus answered: 'Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.' It was the beginning of a contest of wits that was to last through the day. The clever Jerusalem authorities imagined that it would be no very difficult matter to undermine the country-teacher's influence. They had been long trained in the niceties of theological dialectics. They got more than they looked for, and that quickly. Jesus possessed a brilliant mind, and easily extricated himself from their verbal snares. Surrounded by a throng of admirers he held them at bay. In covert parables he presented his claim to be the Christ. His daring demonstration of the morning before had

made him a popular figure; already the restless rabble of 'beggary and piety' looked upon him in the light of a champion. Yet the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem, and all men knew that Jesus was the son of an artisan in Nazareth. To get round this difficulty of his obscure origin, he reminded his listeners of a verse from the Psalms. 'I will praise thee; for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner.' From this he went on to deal with the difficulty of his birth, proving again out of the Psalms that the Messiah was by no means of necessity to be a descendant of King David. 'For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, the Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool.' David therefore himself called the Messiah Lord, an expression he would never have used had he been his son. It was a keen and expert point, but one that, put like this, seemed clear as day to the pilgrim throng. It made it possible for the Messiah to be in no way connected with the royal house. We are told by Saint Mark that 'the common people,' whose sympathies were naturally democratic, 'heard him gladly.' His enemies could only sulkily

retort: 'Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed on him? . . . Search, and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.'

Certain of the Sadducees now approached. These wealthy and comfortable priests had inherited the aristocratic Asmonæan traditions, and, being well-satisfied with the world as it was, were stout believers in the annihilation of the spirit after death. It was their custom to make sport of their more punctilious brethren, the Pharisees, ridiculing their zeal, and scoffing to see them furbish and burnish the golden candlesticks. 'If they could, they would wash the sun,' they sneered. These practical politicians now propounded one of those riddles which for time out of mind have been used to deride the tender-minded fancies of the devout. Jesus parried with them like any Pharisee. When men rise from the dead, 'they neither marry, nor are given in marriage'; and as a proof that they do rise from the dead, he quoted from the Book of Exodus, reminding them that when Moses was herding Jethro's sheep in 'the back-side of the desert,' God had spoken to him, saying, 'I am the god of thy father, the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac, and the god of Jacob,' proving thereby that he considered himself the God of the patriarchs

long after they had 'seen corruption,' for he is not the God of the dead, but 'the God of the living.' Did the mind of Jesus, as he stood among the stir of life so vivid and insistent, actually envisage for a moment those three venerable cadavers, the one a mummy, the other two wrapped in black dust, lying side by side in the fastness of their cave not so many miles from where he stood? 'Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' Once more the victory had been his, and the milk-sleek, cat-sly, subtle Sadducees slipped back out of sight. A scribe who had been listening now presented another question. 'Which is the first commandment of all?' The man had perhaps been impressed by the readiness of Christ's arguments, and felt a genuine intellectual interest in hearing what the original mind of this gifted rabbi would answer to his question. Again, like a true Jew, conversant from his birth with the Torah, Jesus replied without hesitation: 'Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. . . . And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' The scribe was satisfied. Well had the answer conformed to the one the great Hillel had

given, standing like a stork on one leg: 'The law, worship, and charity are the pillars of the world.' Such commandments, the scribe agreed, were more than 'all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' When Jesus realized that the question had been put in all seriousness, he said to the lawyer: 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven.'

The Pharisees now saw that it was no easy task to entangle Jesus, and they consulted among themselves as to what they should do next. It was clear that this popular bush-prophet definitely laid claims to be the deliverer, the long-expected one. Of necessity such claims challenged not only their influence, but the suzerainty of the Herods, and, indeed, of the Romans. It was just here that these 'pestle-like' Pharisees thought they might catch him, just here that they might devise a wait-a-bit thorn for this flatterer. With simulated respect they once more entered the dangerous circle of his audience. 'We know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?' They had put forward the burning question of the hour, and each man in the crowd waited breathlessly for the answer. For years the iron yoke of the

foreigners had galled the necks of the Jews. Now, if ever, was the chance for this new leader of the people to speak out boldly. Jesus said, 'Bring me a penny, that I may see it.' The small coin with the head of Tiberius was produced. Jesus looked at the effigy of the intellectual and unhappy man, and uttered his clever, memorable words: 'Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.' It was a masterly evasion, and the onlookers 'marvelled at him'; but at the same time the Pharisees had scored their point. It can hardly be doubted that this avowed concession to the rule of the Romans was a cause of deep disappointment to many of his patriotic followers. They must look elsewhere for help. This Galilean was, after all, no practical revolutionary of the kind their hearts desired.

Perhaps it was just then, stung by the trick that had been played upon him, that Jesus uttered his famous denunciation of the representatives of conventional religion. 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. . . . Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. . . . Ye blind guides! which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. . . . Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers! how can ye escape the damnation of hell?' And the chief priests and Pharisees were chafed in their minds, and consulted the one with the other how they might compass the death of this 'mocker at the words of the wise.' They sent certain of their followers, feigning themselves to be 'just men,' to listen to him, on the chance of his betraying himself by some indiscretion of speech. Jesus and his company were now preparing to leave the temple; and as they went out, a disciple again endeavoured to direct the attention of his Master to the beauty and magnificence of the Herodian architecture. He may have spoken at the very instant that one of the 'stool-pigeons' of the priestly plotters was plaguing Jesus for a sign to prove his Messiahship; at any rate, Jesus turned impatiently, and looking back over his shoulder at the mass of piled-up dead stones, gave utterance to this extraordinary challenge. 'Destroy this temple,' he said, 'and in three days I will raise it up.' They were dangerous words to be uttered

in the hearing of men who cherished in their hearts a fanatical loyalty to the great monument of national worship. Even the simulating spies could scarcely withstrain their astonishment at hearing so arrogant a blasphemy. 'Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?'

Judas Iscariot also, it appears, shared the shocked disillusionment of the mob; and the thought now came into his head to betray Jesus. 'Nothing will fill the eye of man save a handful of earth.' Legend suggests that he made his first overture to Joseph Caiaphas, when that high priest, after his day's work, had retired to his pomegranate gardens on the Hill of Evil Council, to the south of the city. It may very well have been, therefore, along an alley of green college-grass, bordered with henna-flowers, that Judas passed, nursing in his heart his unhappy purpose. Under the pressure of the persecutions of the Middle Ages, he became to the Jews a national hero, a patriotic wizard, who had withstood and overcome the baleful influence of an anti-nationalist traitor. There is something hidden and unexplained about the man's psychology. It is clear that up to the last

few days in Jerusalem, Jesus had trusted him. It was he who carried the money-bag of the travellers, and although after his perfidy he was accused of having embezzled from it, there is no proof of this. The authorities offered to pay him thirty pieces of silver for the service he proposed to do for them. It was the usual price given for a slave, a sum equivalent in our money to twenty dollars, or four pounds sterling. The preliminary transaction probably took place before the Last Supper; and if this was so, then the 'son of perdition' left the table as soon as ever he was assured that Jesus proposed to spend the rest of the evening in his favourite orchard at the foot of the Mount of Olives, giving thereby a convenient opportunity for his arrest without tumult. It is also possible, and there is much to support the theory, that there actually existed an understanding between Jesus and Judas. Mr. Middleton Murry is the latest one to offer this suggestion. Certainly, it was a central feature of Christ's plan that he should sacrifice himself at the time of the great feast of national redemption, and he may well have taken deliberate steps to insure its fulfilment.

Whether or not this was true, it cannot be doubted that the unfortunate disciple, as soon as

he realized what he had done, was tortured beyond all endurance by remorse. Indeed, he went so far as to return the blood-money he had received. But even this objective act of repentance did not bring back peace to his soul. 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood,' he said. And the priests answered, 'What is that to us? see thou to that.' Judas 'cast down the pieces of silver in the temple' and went out. A story tells us that he then returned to his home, where his wife was preparing for him a supper of a well-basted cock. In gloomy meditation he told her of his belief in Christ's resurrection after three days. 'Woe unto us, woe unto us,' he kept repeating; and she, in exasperation, answered, 'As well as this cock that is roasting on the fire of coals can crow, just so well shall Jesus of Nazareth rise again.' A miracle, Homenas, a miracle! for the cock rose up and crowed thrice. Judas Iscariot had no heart to die 'in his nest.' He went out to hang himself. Even amid the more tragic happenings of those cursed hours it is impossible for our imaginations not to be stirred by the contemplation of the misery of this man, as he walked in search of a tree suitable to his purpose. What tree was it that he eventually found? Sir John Mandeville asserted

that it was an elder; and it may well have been that the astringent smell from young elder-leaves in the spring was actually the last odour registered by his nostrils. 'And fast by is yet the tree of elder that Judas hanged himself upon, for despair that he had, when he sold and betrayed our Lord.' The venerable Bede, however, declared that it was a fig tree. To-day a forlorn pine is pointed out to us as a relic of that suicide. I saw it from the distance, but was unable to reach it. It is written in the Gospel of Saint Thomas: 'A soul in trouble is near unto God.'

It was at the 'Seder,' at the Last Supper, in an upper chamber selected for secrecy by Jesus, that the sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist was instituted. It was then that those solemn words were uttered that have had so incalculable an influence upon our Western life. The Eleven were gathered about their master, and he took the bread and brake it, and the cup of sanctification and gave it to them to drink. 'And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you. . . . Likewise also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. . . . This do in

remembrance of me.' Down the ages they have come, those strange, daring words, inaugurating an arcanum, an incredible rite: barbarous in the conception of its savage ritualism, it has yet haunted the minds and comforted the souls of countless generations. It is clear that the mystical power of this central sacrament of Christ's teaching has gathered to itself sweet influences of tranquil, spiritual rapture, such as the godless seldom, if ever, experience. It offers an unreasonable challenge, hidden 'from the wise and prudent.' Before its manifestations our small-hour frights are lifted. Here is a perfect offering, a pure offering, in which the foolish can find, and do find, consolation. Blood and flesh, wine and bread, and above our foreheads the unpartisan, confident sun, and below our feet that wholesome soil which alone knows how to deal 'sensibly with man.' Who can estimate these hidden matters, this word that has gone forth? It is everything, it is nothing. Primitive and shocking in its invention, it yet draws men unto it with an irresistible attraction. It survives against odds. *Hoc est corpus*, hocus-pocus, we cry; but yet, as the centuries pass, even amid the shallow chattering of our present-day society, this custom, this secret experience, continues to

fortify men's minds, men's inner beings. Who is able to withstand, who is able to gainsay, the power of this religious mystery, of this unclassical mystery, of this mystical mystery, that has come creeping down to us at the steps of a thousand altars shut off from the health-giving light of day? 'Do this in remembrance of me.' Is it faith, is it the result of our pathetic faculty for faith, that causes the devout to give such punctilious attention to those few words, or do they, in actual fact, represent in visible outward form an inward umbilical cord of redemption? 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will not pass away.' A credulous utterance, preserved by the credulous in a void of unimaginable dimensions! There is no dogma believed in by man that is not disbelieved in by as many. What is truth? There is no truth. The religions of all the world, what are they? A whistling to deceived mice, that is all. This 'morality touched with emotion' has ever been responsible for tyrannies. It abnegates damaging and daring insights. It forbids those dangerous, dispassionate absolutions of the disobedient mind. 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he

know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' Yet hear the words of Jesus and pause. 'Where there is one alone I say I am with him. Lift up the stone and thou shalt find me: cleave the wood and I am there.'

As I write these words, with the grey-vert olive trees and blue Mediterranean still before my visual eyes, with consciousness still my treasured possession, my mind reverts to far-distant memories, and I see once more in an English church the ancient celebration taking place. Was he mistaken also, that venerable figure at the altar, so aged in mind that it was necessary for him to renew his memory of the grave beatific words from a prayer-book on the holy table, moving backwards and forwards from it: as he proffered the elements did he, that old man, the father of my very bones, contribute but to a deceit? 'Do this in remembrance of me.' It was an injunction definite, consistent, and not to be neglected. It constitutes in itself, in its long existence, an incomparable illustration of the poetry, averse to all commonplace explanations, that is actually every day present with us. Now, at this moment, as I see before me the white smoke from Vesuvius rising so proudly into the circumambient atmosphere of the

visible planet, my mind turns to those other 'comforters.' I recall the teachings of that other blessed one, sitting under his mango tree, or in his 'leaf hut' by pools of blue lotus. 'Whatsoever is an arising thing, all that is a ceasing thing. . . . Steeped in lust, shrouded in thick darkness, they will not see what goes against the stream, abstruse, deep, difficult to perceive, and subtle.' Even the prophet Mohammed, 'this camel whose nose would not be struck,' though never wholly released from his cruder imprisonment, teaches us with the selfsame murmurings. Inspired recreants to life, revealers of half-secrets who steal the souls of the young, and who, too enfeebled themselves to drink of the strong draught offered, lead out of the way the children of men.

Even in the hour of death, upon the very threshold of the grave, I would not hesitate to speak out what is in my mind. I would have no boy or girl turn from the earth, with its ancient usages, its ancient messages, its ancient reassurance. When the hidden bell rings, when the chancel echoes at the time of high mass, let them be 'like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he

never so wisely.' Have care, O heathen youth! These matters remain unproven. Let not the free action of your minds, or the free action of your bodies, be impeded or checked by the resonant intoning of priests, as they walk in procession, dressed in lace. There remain raptures more real than any of these indrawn beatitudes. The wine of life is good, it is of the fruit of the grape-bearing earth. The bread of life is good, it is of the fruit of the corn-bearing earth. What though decay is inherent in all component things? We have our hour. All things flow away. All things tend to their end. 'What a cursed frenzy is this, to think that life is to be renewed by death!' Be generous, be free, be impassioned, be *understanding*, children 'of herbs and fruits and abstinences.' Give no heed to these false teachers, but with emancipated hearts make your escape sure. Your heathen loyalties shall be deeper and truer than their loyalties. Leave these dingy temples with their unsnuffed candle-lights to the infirm and to the old. Even now your hour passes. With ineluctable glee dip your hands deep into the salt fresh sea of life. Lift up your eyes and behold the sun.

'Woe to thee, Boethusim; woe to their spears!

Woe to the family of Annas! Woe to their serpent-hissings!' Under the persuasion of this dominant priestly family, the Sanhedrin sent soldiers and serving-men to arrest Jesus. The evil brood clambered into the quiet, secluded garden, with their lanterns and sticks and staves; and as the light flickered between the crooked trunks, not far from the olive-press, Judas gave his 'sign.' The disciples forsook Jesus and fled. They resembled a 'wet flock on a winter's night' – were like 'affrighted asses fleeing from a lion.' Simon Peter alone followed to the house of that pest of the people, Annas. The preliminary trial, however, took place later, in the hall of his son-in-law, Caiaphas, the acting high priest.

'Three things come unexpectedly, a scorpion, a treasure-trove, and the Messiah.' Here in his hall, Joseph Caiaphas, who alone was privileged to enter the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, asked Jesus the direct question: 'Art thou the Christ, the son of the Blessed?' And Jesus, the son of the Nazareth carpenter, answered him: 'I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.' The open avowal, in such company, of what he had for so long kept hidden, must have stirred

Jesus to the very depth of his being. The intense spirituality of his nature in its silent communing had reached its apex in this childlike expectation. This it was that had carried him forward over the thorns and jagged stones of his selected way. Jesus had stored his memory with the inspired writings of the Holy Scriptures. The wildest and the most solemn secrets in the strange assortment he had assimilated to himself, strengthening his transcendental confidence by esoteric interpretations of these winged words. And in the small hours of that morning, surrounded by a crowd of sceptical, custom-ridden priests, he recalled the passage from the Book of Daniel which had for so long a time haunted his thoughts. He had read it in Nazareth, he had pondered over it in the wilderness. It had been with him as he measured and shaped the innocent Galilean timber, as he sat among the brown fishing-nets spread out and drying in the sun, as he rested under glittering peaked rocks in happy man-deserted valleys. 'I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all

people, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.' The high priest rent his pontifical skirts, saying: 'He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses?' To the ears of the subtle prelate, who so often from the steps of the sanctuary had lifted up his hands to bless the people, the words of the prisoner were shocking and intolerable. They were a challenge to his position, a challenge to all the proud practices of his nation's religion, an affront to God. The very bells on his fringed garments tinkled. 'Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.' Raca! Raca! Raca! The worst suspicions of the temple priests had been justified. They haled him before the procurator, Pontius Pilate; they haled him before Herod. They spat 'into his face,' they buffeted him, they mocked him for his pretensions, they scourged him in a house 'no better than a weaver's shop,' and he opened not his mouth. They dressed him up as for a charade, and put a reed in his hand for a sceptre, and knelt down before him. Herod Antipas had his desire; but when he looked upon the prophet, eye to eye, behold, he was not John

the Baptist. He had hoped to see some miracle done by him, and lo, the itinerant soothsayer answered him nothing. In a mood of heartless banter he took from his guardrobe soft clothing, and adorned him and sent him back to the Roman. All the forces of the blind and brutal world assaulted this pretender who was no pretender. Seldom has it fallen to the lot of humankind to have in its absolute power a proper god. Now by the olive and the fig they would show what they could do.

The Jews used to say that there were nine hundred and three ways by which a man might die. The best of these they compared to drawing a hair out of milk, and the worst to tearing out a thread from a piece of closely-woven cloth. Crucifixion as a method of taking life was not a custom indigenous to Rome. The Romans had learnt it from the Carthaginians, who themselves had been taught it by the Persians. It was, in fact, a product of the sensual and ghastly Orient. 'Crucify him, crucify him!' they shouted. They followed his steps as the white-trash in the South will limp after a negro. 'His blood be on us and on our children,' they yelled. All the ugliness, the febrile evil lurking in the heart of man, leapt

out on that Friday morning. Mohammed used to say that the Jews never crucified Jesus, but that he was represented by one in his likeness, 'a phantom, a beast, in the shape of a man.' It seemed to him beyond credence that God should have allowed such degradation of suffering to fall upon one of his prophets. When King Clovis, at the time of his conversion, had the story of the crucifixion repeated to him, he is reported to have said simply: 'Would I had been there with my Franks.' But there were no Franks, no angels from Heaven, to come with the mighty arm of deliverance. Wickedness was drunken with power. She reeled in the narrow streets. Blasphemously she shouted Hosanna. And still the blameless object of all this villainy, the impotent victim of it, uttered no word. Still, still was the spirit of Jesus supported by an impossible personal assurance, an impossible personal dream. His tormentors could break his body, but never his spirit. Against all reason, in the midst of the vindictive and insane tumult, it preserved unsullied its calm purity. It was so when he staggered out of the execrable northern gate, the Ephraim Gate, with his instrument of torture on his shoulder. It was so when they nailed him to the cross.

There they had caught him at last, and good men turned away in horror. It was like seeing a hare, with long, sensitive ears, in the power of coarse dairymen; and well they knew that these men would never have done, as long as the mystery of life quivered. Outside the walls of Jerusalem, at the place of the skull, at the 'navel of the earth,' they lifted him up for all men's eyes to see. *Rex Judæorum hic est.* As they went by along the road, scoffers wagged their heads at 'the one that was hung.' There was none to save.

In the noon-hour a great darkness fell upon the land. The sun became 'black as sackcloth,' and a mysterious cloud settled upon the ancient circle of hills. It lay heavy over the vale of Jehoshaphat, over the white temple, and over the broad-backed city walls. It engirdled in a sad half-light the garden of Gethsemane, where the fresh Spring grass and coloured April anemones still preserved the impress of Christ's knees. It was no cloud 'out of the west,' presaging a shower such as Jesus had so often looked up at; it was chilling and ecliptic and full of doom. 'How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, and he seeth not: and he walketh in the circuit of the heaven.'

What were they busy with, that sinister group on the neighbouring hill? They were watching the death of a god. The hours lengthened toward sunset. The earth continued its ordered flight through the pathless tracks, and nothing said. Never again would the lips of this deluded man, so humble and so to be adored, utter words of priceless illumination. They were stopping the stream at its fountain-head. They were killing life, murdering hope. And the mind of him who was the centre of the hideous action, the mind of Yeshu hanged upon 'a cabbage-stalk,' how did it work during the appalling agony of those hours? Suddenly Jesus opened his mouth and cried out in the Syriac vernacular, in the language of his babyhood, the most lamentable and tragic words that history has to record: 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

The long travail, the long labour, of the Jews had brought to birth their incarnation. They had created a trust out of nothing. In the blackness of the night a light had shone, gleamed, burnt clearly for a season, and had been extinguished. A series of chances rekindled it and established it upon a myriad altars. The flame was not the same

flame, but it possessed enough of its original life to ensure for it a period of survival. Under the direction and passionate conviction of men who feared death, it was spread abroad. The Western world had been given the clue to its own longings, and desire became the handmaid of reason. The report of Christ's resurrection was repeated with more and more conviction, by a 'cloud of witnesses.' Against the face of ordered laws, impassive and merciless, the miraculous intervened, and upon a few scattered words of grace there arose an estate of overbearing power. Out of good came forth evil; and upon the hearts of men, fearful, unsure, and easily taken in, there once more descended Pharaoh's chickens, those ubiquitous vultures of God, the priests. They darkened men's minds, they fed on their credulity, they poisoned and enslaved their bodies. To be rid of their tradition it is necessary to outface the dishonour of the body in death. They cling close. Denying the simple truths engendered out of the mould, they superimpose their own distraught hallucinations. To their own profit they mislead us, 'bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.'

The Jews, with their long, long memories,

obstinate and obdurate, remained 'steadfast in their unbelief.' They utterly rejected Christianity, and followed their own woeful ways, bearded and with curled locks. They had given a god to the Gentiles, and were drowned and burnt and beaten because they would not believe what their peculiar genius had alone made possible. 'If I had power over them,' said Martin Luther, 'I would assemble their most prominent men and demand that they prove that we Christians do not worship one God, under the penalty of having their tongues torn out through the backs of their necks.' The wrath of the world was against them. It was now their destiny to bear the burden of an unfortunate judicial accident. Amongst the Gentiles, 'Jew-roaster' was regarded as an honourable title. They, in their turn, were now laughed to scorn. '*Hierosolima Est Perdita*, Jerusalem is lost, *H-E-P*, *H-E-P*,' resounded through the ghettos of the Rhine towns, as a preliminary cry to persecutions and massacres. To our shame, in our times the long beards of these 'Christ-killers' are still plucked by the graceless.

From the first, Christ's illumination was perverted. It is perverted to-day. The secret come down to us is not the secret of Jesus. 'This absurd

and exaggerated superstition' is the product of the mind of Saint Paul. He, of course, is the real inventor of Christianity as an organized religion. Few characters in history have been more baffling. What a wizard of egoism is here! I, I, I, I, I must be this, I must be that, I must be holy, must be humble, must be the least of all. But with his ugliness and his shuddering 'thorns in the flesh,' this Jew of Jews has gone deeper into the terrors of the spirit than any man. Doubt it not, Saul (called Paul) could have tortured Solomon's devils better than the great king himself. It was this man who, in a manner more spiritual than all the saints, and martyrs, and apostles, and evangelists, loved the Redeemer of the world; 'and yet not I, but Christ which is in me.' It was he who developed the flowing-away, world-undermining doctrine (so lovely to some, so contemptible to others) about the weak overcoming the strong, the foolish overcoming the clever, the things-that-are-not overcoming those that are!

From the moment that the crying of a Christian baby at a font echoes with disobedience through the nave and aisles of a hollow church, till the hour when a man's body heaves its last breath, all is mystery. It is Easter-time in the world to-day;

and as I write these words at Capri, I know that primroses must be beginning to appear, warm and soft, down near the leaf-mould of Horse's Cover. Yet even with my mind burdened with tender memories of the religion of my childhood, I cannot find it in me to write otherwise. The explanation of the magical mutations of electrons, of the stars clustering like golden bees in unending spaces, of the confident, unhesitating workings of Nature within bodies, of the miracle of generation, and of the irrevocability of death, does not reside here. The sound of waters, the songs of birds, poignant with intimations, the loveliness of the patient, unstipulating vegetation, hold the secret of a far-different solution. Christianity is but a single radiant eddy in that deep, dark stream of shadow and sunshine which bears us along together, plants and beasts and men, towards the engulfing ocean of an unfathomable and unintelligible eternity.